THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY

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BY
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AND
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BOSTON
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PART ONE

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THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

MIDNIGHT was long past, and the fire in the grate was burning low; but as minute after minute was ticked off by the old clock on the mantel, Chester Clarke still sat in his study absorbed in his review of the incidents of the evening. He had attended a dinner given by the Sons to the Daughters of the American Revolution. While the speakers had rehearsed once more the oft-told tales of Boston's Colonial history, "that chain of events which led to the American Revolution, and finally secured the liberty and independence of the United States," he had occupied himself with an unconcerned, time-passing survey of the audience.

The chance opening of a vista across the room had given him a glimpse of a woman whose appearance had impressed him so

swiftly and so deeply that thereafter he had neglected no opportunity to note some new detail of her extraordinary charm: the black abundance of her lustrous hair; the delicacy of her profile; the brilliant play of light and shadow over her expressive face; the poise of her head; the beauty of her neck and shoulders; the perfect contour of her figure. These things alone would not have moved him so deeply; but they were, he perceived, the outward manifestations of such a distinctly individual personality as he had never seen before. The grace of her every motion served to indicate to him the crowning graciousness of a lovely character. Something indefinable about her suggested that she was a stranger to her present surroundings.

Chester Clarke had not been looking for "the one woman," but he had accepted without question the certainty of her ultimate appearance, and now he knew that he was in her presence. It was all very simple; it was also satisfying. He must meet this woman; he must establish a claim upon her acquaintance. He waited calmly for the opportunity. It was not long withheld. The after-dinner "exercises" came to their

appointed close. The last speaker's last word was uttered. As the audience dispersed, Clarke kept his lady in sight as she passed from the dining room into the parlors. An acquaintance of his stopped to speak to the elderly couple who accompanied her, and in a moment more he had secured the desired introduction.

He recalled now, with some amusement, the eagerness with which he had seized upon the opportunity, and the earnestness of his endeavor to compass in a few minutes what, with a strict regard for the conventionalities, should have been the work of days. That she had responded so sympathetically to his informal advances augured well. He realized now that he should have been startled, perhaps dismayed, when she was named to him as "Mrs. Willoughby." That implied the possibility of embarrassing complications. Could his premonitions of affinity, so vividly convincing, have disregarded the existence of a legal obstacle? He had felt no misgivings, he remembered, even in the brief interval before she had so unaffectedly, so naturally, let him know that she was a widow. She had indeed "let him know," she had not distinctly told him, she had not

proclaimed the fact; she had simply made him aware that there had been a Mr. Willoughby. She had also let him know that she was mother to a noble boy and a beautiful little girl. She was visiting these old friends of her family, out in the suburbs; her own home was in Topeka. She remarked that in a day or two she was going to Toronto to join her children, who were in school there.

As Clarke reconstructed the situation, he rejoiced in the discovery of the one woman in the world who could meet a man half way, with unconventional frankness, yet with perfect womanliness of decorum. She had given him the address of the friends with whom she was staying. Then: "Come, Louise," they had called; and the interview closed with the graceful inanities of a conventional parting.

So Chester Clarke had been guilty of that last monstrosity of the emotions, "love at first sight." Well — so be it! There were classic precedents. (If anyone thought that Chester Clarke needed the support of precedent.) At any rate what had happened had indubitably happened, and if it had been rather radical, the utmost — and the least

—that a confirmed conservative could do was to see it through.

Chester Clarke had had a noble mother; their relations had been peculiarly sympathetic and tender. She had died before he had emerged from his teens, but the memory of her life and her teachings had been cherished.

His admiration of her had naturally extended to her sex. Because he had honored his mother, he honored all women. He was not deaf to the call of sex, but he was not romantic. He was chivalrous, and he liked women. He thoroughly enjoyed the society of intelligent, womanly women. He had had a sister of about his own age, and the home had been the centre of a young social set. His fads were masculine, completely. He had pulled an oar in a winning Harvard crew, and since his college days he had gained some renown as a hunter of big game. But he had always come back from his trips into the wilds with renewed zest for social functions—particularly if they had literary flavor.

Like all manly men, he had had his "cub" love affairs and he had sometimes, in the spirit of adventure, taken up the challenge

which some woman had thrown down; but he had never carried these affairs to the extreme, he had preferred to incur the contempt of the lady rather than to smirch his own honor or hers. He represented the Puritan tradition at its very best.

As for marriage, Clarke, like every other normal man, had looked forward to the day when he should marry, and become the head of a family; and, like every other man, he had formed his ideas as to what the inevitable woman would be like. But he had not tried to "make a choice" among the many eligible young ladies of his acquaintance; he had always felt that some day the right woman would appear, and he had no doubt that he would quickly recognize her.

He had never thought of marrying a widow — and a widow with two children! Yet, now that he had met the lady, that was her exact status — a widow with two children. But, so complete had been his surrender, the fact did not disturb him, did not cause a moment's wavering. He turned to his desk, and wrote, without hesitation or seeking after suitable words:

"THE BOLINGBROKE,
"BOSTON, March 15, 19—.

"MY DEAR MRS. WILLOUGHBY:—

"I know that in sending this note I lay myself open to criticism, but you were so very kind this evening that I venture to make this appeal.

"Is it not possible for me to have another opportunity of meeting you before you leave Massachusetts? I should consider it a great good fortune if I might!

"I am, I assure you,
"Most sincerely yours,
"CHESTER CLARKE."

Having written this note, Clarke stood for more than a minute looking at his mother's picture on the mantel over the fireplace. Then he snapped off the light and went to bed.

CHAPTER II

THE next day was a long one for Clarke. He spent it at his law office, where, holding himself mechanically to his task, he got through an extraordinary amount of work. None of his associates had reason to suspect that his calm exterior concealed a state of mind the description of which, coupled with Chester Clarke's name, they would have considered flatly incredible.

That night he went to a dance. It was better than sitting in his room in the apartment, or at one of his clubs; but all evening, as all through the day, he found his mind preoccupied with speculation on the outcome of the adventure upon which he had launched; an adventure only in the best meaning of the word. He wondered if Mrs. Willoughby would plead previous engagements. She had met him with remarkable frankness, and with something more than cordiality; but could he justly assume that her manner had been more frank and cordial than it would have been with another

man — with any other man she might have met under the same circumstances?

Ah! but could she have met any other man under the same circumstances — quite the same? For Clarke felt that she must have known that he did not regard that introduction as a casual, common thing. He was certain that no one else among those present could possibly have suspected how important the immediate winning of this woman's friendly interest had suddenly become to him; and he was equally positive that, to her, it had been no more secret than a lofty spire glittering in the sunlight.

So much for his part. What of hers? She had recognized his secret, he could not doubt, in one swift flash of comprehension. But why, understanding him thus intimately, had she met him with so much encouragement? Was she insincere? It is not always the man who betrays! No — her sweet womanliness was her guaranty. She had had experience of the world, and it had not hardened her; it had given her insight and assurance, swift understanding and clear judgment, enabling her to adopt a course of conduct without experimental manœuvring. And if he was right, then surely the

woman for whose coming he had waited had at last entered upon the stage of his life.

Clarke felt sure that she would reply to his letter. She might say that she did not care to meet him again, privately; or she might appoint a time and place, with full recognition of the seriousness of his intentions. There had been too much of clear, unobstructed, intuitive understanding in their brief first conversation to be followed by anything but finality, for happiness or sadness, in the correspondence which he had initiated.

The first mail the next morning, delivered at Clarke's apartment just before the customary moment of his departure for the office, brought him an envelope which must be hers. He recognized at once her quality in the handwriting of the address, and the confirming evidence of the postmark. The words within were few, but eminently satisfactory to the reader.

"I was glad," she said, simply, "to have your note. I shall be in town shopping tomorrow, and you may see me at the Somerset at three o'clock." And "tomorrow" then was "today" now. A few more hours, and he would be with her.

As he walked through the Public Garden —just a little jauntily!—he grasped a passing ragamuffin by the arm, put a quarter into his non-resistant hand, smiled into his puzzled face and said: "Everybody ought to be specially happy today, my boy —let's start it." Then, seeing one or two passersby looking at him curiously, he quickly brought himself down from the clouds, and proceeded with more customary dignity to the scene of his daily labors.

He tried to forget himself in the exactions of his profession. He drew some papers which his elder partner proclaimed a work of pure genius—Law married to Poetry—and made in a moment decisions which ordinarily would have been slowly pondered. And, timing himself to reach the hotel at exactly five minutes before three, he closed his desk and went out.

"Mrs. Walter Willoughby": the name was easily found on the hotel register, for the handwriting was markedly individual. But the signature affected Clarke in an undefined, vaguely disturbing way. Walter! In a little while she would discard her former husband's name. Probably it was unreasonable for him to consider her present

retention of it rather more prolonged than was quite necessary.

This was but a fleeting impression, and did not delay him long. He sent up his card, and seated himself in the ladies' parlor, where he would have the best view of her as she entered the room. As she paused just a moment at the door, and then as she crossed the room to meet him, he was overwhelmed again by her beauty and by that peculiar charm of graciousness which had attracted him at the dinner of the Sons and Daughters. Second impression not only confirmed but magnified the first.

He wondered what would be her first words. Her cordial smile seemed to convey, more adequately than the words of a conventional greeting could have done it, the fact that she welcomed him; and, selecting one from a cluster of rosebuds in her hand, she said:

"Do you like flowers? But of course you do—you love them! May I give you this?"

And she drew the stem through his buttonhole. It was a simple thing enough. Was it ingenuous simplicity, or a rehearsed device? Clarke, manlike, admired the combined daintiness and deftness of her man-

agement; and was conscious, as she stood so near, of a radiance, an aroma — a combined appeal to the senses that was intoxicating, but at the same time supersensual. This must be what the spiritists tried to express in their favorite word "aura."

In the moment that was consumed in conducting her to a secluded alcove of the large room, Clarke steadied himself. The self-possession of the Clarkes, which had failed them in no crisis of life since the first of their long line had bought the ancestral acres from their aboriginal owners for a jug of "fire-water," saved him from embarrassment. Mrs. Willoughby's unaffectedly unconventional friendliness banished all possibility of awkwardness. Conversation naturally reverted to their first meeting.

"Do you know," he said, "it was only an impulse that made me go to that dinner the other night? I had n't intended to go out, but almost at the last moment the whim came upon me, and I went. Was n't it great luck? I should probably never have met you, had it not been for that sudden impulse, and I assure you, I so seldom do things in that rather childish way that I declare I believe my lucky star was working

for me! I do not know whether to be grateful to a kind Providence, or to the blind god of Chance."

"Why, Mr. Clarke," she said, "how strange! Really, it was only by accident that I was there, myself. I had n't been out since my husband died, almost a year ago. My friends begged me to go with them, and I simply could n't resist — they are such dear old people, and family friends of long standing, you know. So I, too, almost stayed away."

"How very human we both were," said Clarke, "going to our good fortune under protest! Though, of course, I can't expect you to be as much pleased with the result as I am! Perhaps you are wondering how I could ever have been so unceremonious, and are going to scold me?"

"Oh, dear" — it seemed almost the affectionate vocative, rather than the impersonal expletive — "Oh, dear, no! Not at all! Really, I understand you better than that. You were anxious to be nice to me, the stranger in the crowd. And it was pleasant to have you greet me so informally, with such frank friendliness."

"You really are a stranger in Boston?"

"Not exactly a stranger. Rather, an old friend revisiting the town. Father sent me here, when I was a slip of a girl, to study music — the violin. We of the West, while professing to despise your 'effete East,' really worship it. And the Boston Conservatory of Music was thought of as a Parnassus in Massachusetts. So I came here to study, and I knew the city very well then. It seems strange to me now."

She sighed prettily, and Clarke thought how unprotected, how possibly lonely she seemed.

"Father was very proud of my playing," she said brightly, after a moment of sympathetic silence, in which she seemed to be thoroughly appreciating his unworded friendliness. "But after a couple of years of study here I went off to New York, for a year, and was married to Mr. Willoughby and — there was a sudden end to the budding career!"

"What a pity! But, surely, you did not give up your music entirely?"

"Oh, no! Sometime you shall hear me play. Once each year we had a grand musicale out home, with professionals down from the city — St. Louis, you know. And I, as

an amateur, always took a part. I really enjoyed it, and my friends were kind enough to say that they did, too. The newspapers of the State always sent a reporter."

"I am sure everybody must have enjoyed it, Mrs. Willoughby."

Clarke spoke with conviction; and his appreciative auditor did not remind him that, having never heard her play, he was hardly qualified to pass judgment. She seemed, womanlike, to be too completely satisfied with the kindness of his assertion to be concerned about its critical competence.

"But how you must have regretted giving up your career," he added.

"Regretted it? Well, yes — and no. You see, my husband took me to his home in the West, where the great and famous Willoughby Works are. You have heard of them, of course; but you cannot possibly imagine what an Institution — with a capital I — they are out there. I was busy with my new home, and then the children came — "

She used these little pauses with artistic skill.

"Was Mr. Willoughby a music lover?" Clarke asked. "Did he share your delight in these entertainments?"

A slight film seemed to him to screen the warm light of her eyes as she replied:

"Mr. Willoughby was fond of only one thing, and that was — business. He was proud of my accomplishments; but he never had time to enjoy them with me. He was always busy. He wore himself half out making his fortune; and when it was made, he wore himself out completely, making it bigger."

"Are your children musical?"

Mrs. Willoughby's face brightened, the shadow fled.

"Alice is," she said. "Ernest is just like his father, strong willed and difficult to manage. He has no great gift for music, but he plays fairly well, and enjoys it with me. But oh, Mr. Clarke," she hastened on, "what a responsibility! Alice is a dear little thing, she has never given me a moment of anxiety. Ernest is a fine fellow, but then — he is a boy, and I am only a woman, as he might say — so unfitted for the great task of bringing up a boy. I have only one ambition for him. Wealth, station, fame, a great career — I don't care for these things, if I can only help him grow up to be a clean, honest, noble man. If I can give him char-

acter, these other things will take care of themselves. You are a man, you must know about such matters, where I, a woman, can only plan, and hope — and wonder. Am I not right, dear Mr. Clarke, — please tell me I 'm right!"

"You *are* right, Mrs. Willoughby — indeed you are! Your son has such a mother as I myself was blessed with. Your words seem to me like an echo of hers. In her dear, old-fashioned way she used to quote: 'the pomp of circumstance and the pride of power' — you know, Gray's lines about 'the inevitable hour,' and 'the paths of glory.'"

He, too, paused a moment; whether skilfully or not, certainly with effect. Then he said:

"But there is your father. He must exercise a great and helpful influence upon your Ernest."

"Father? Oh, if my dear son would only turn out as well as he has! He had no education to speak of, and he fought his way to the top by sheer force of character and intellect. Business could not spoil *him!* I wish you could know him — I am sure you will, some day. We were inseparable when I was a child. But he is not well, now, and

he can't be with Ernest as much as I should like to have him, and as he would like to be. My mother is different. She is very reserved; distant, even with her own children. She never really understood me."

"Did your father and mother come East with you, Mrs. Willoughby?"

"No, they are at my home in Topeka. My father went out there to close up my husband's estate, and take care of my interests. Things would have been in very bad shape, without his splendid business instinct and experience."

Another of those momentary silences, in which they seemed to effect an even more complete exchange of ideas than was possible to them through the spoken word. Then she said:

"After my husband's death I did not care to stay in Topeka. The place was simply impossible. I brought the children East and put them in school — in Toronto. I am just going back to them now."

"I can quite understand," said Clarke, "how dreary Topeka would seem to you, after your husband was gone."

"No, Mr. Clarke, you can't — really, you can not! It was not his loss alone that made

the place unbearable to me. It was the Willoughby family." She spoke with unrepressed intensity. "My husband's sisters and his brothers' wives — they had always resented my presence, as an intruder. You can have no idea what a little empire they rule over. They are autocrats. As long as Father Willoughby was alive, they did not show their feeling toward me openly. He was the emperor, and they were afraid of him. But when he was gone, their spite and petty jealousy showed itself. He was always good to me, but I know that he understood them and knew how they really regarded me, for one day he said to me: 'Louise, they are all jealous of you! I can understand it perfectly, too,' he said, 'though I can do nothing to prevent it. You are a woman who will never have many friends among your own sex.' And I never have. I wonder why?"

She paused long enough to give Clarke opportunity to formulate a complimentary answer in his mind, but not to express it orally; then she resumed:

"I did my best to get along with them all, but they seemed always to suspect me of some kind of unfriendly intentions — I

don't know what, and I am quite sure I never gave them any cause for such unfriendliness; but there it was, a very real and a very unpleasant thing. And now they are all hovering around poor old Mother Willoughby, just waiting for her to die—she has the Willoughby millions now, you see. Oh, this money," she exclaimed, with a vehemence that made her in Clarke's eyes more charming than ever, "how I despise it! Not for its own sake," she added, just a little archly, "but for the things it does to the people who let it rule their lives and destroy their happiness."

"Are you going back to Topeka?" asked Clarke.

"Only long enough to pack up and move out. My father is going to build a house in San Francisco, and I shall make my home with him—that is, if mother is willing to have me and the children live with them. If it were not for them, I should be quite alone in the world."

She spoke the words calmly enough, but to Clarke they seemed sad. He wanted to tell her that she need never be alone in the world while he was in it; but he did not trust himself, and so he let the conversation turn

into less intimately personal channels. They were very happy together.

The afternoon waned, and rude barbarians began to invade the privacy of their retreat. Clarke, preparing to wrench himself away from this charming company, said:

"I wish that we might have dined together, but I have an imperative engagement for this evening. It happens that I am the president of the Harvard Alumni Association, and tonight we have our annual dinner. It is to be a very special occasion, too, for we are to entertain the Presidents of Yale and Princeton."

"How delightful!"

"I would gladly forgo the distinction of having these two celebrities on either side of me, to dine with you — but the gallery is to be reserved for the ladies. Perhaps you would do me the honor to attend? It would be a great pleasure to escort you there, and to your hotel after the speaking. I don't like to think of your spending a lonely evening — and it would be a wonderful inspiration to have you present, if I may make so selfish a plea."

"Oh, Mr. Clarke," she cried, "how good of you! I should enjoy it more than any-

thing else that could happen! It will be a real treat. It is ages since I have heard any good public speaking — and, besides, it will be fun to see how you acquit yourself."

"Very well, then — it is settled. I shall call for you at half past six."

And he went away, to await with such patience as he might command the coming of the appointed time.

CHAPTER III

CLARKE was on his way to Toronto, to spend a week-end with the Willoughbys. As he travelled, his mind passed in review the events that marked the history of his friendship with Mrs. Willoughby: the meeting at the dinner of the Sons and Daughters; his note, requesting a more intimate interview, and her favorable reply; their delightful afternoon at the Somerset, and the Harvard dinner the night before her departure for Canada.

That had been a wonderfully successful night, and had strengthened their mutual understanding. He had obtained for her a front seat in the balcony, where many ladies gathered as the hour for the speaking approached. As usual, she had been, quite without ostentation, the most eye-commanding figure of them all; her costuming was so perfectly in tune with the occasion, and her manner so completely adjusted to the situation. From her place of vantage she had

seen, and appreciated to the full, a most impressive manifestation of the spirit of the men of Harvard.

Clarke, presiding, had been at his best: stimulated by pride in his college and by satisfaction in the presence of his friend. It had been a Harvard night long to be remembered, from the first moment to the last when all, standing, sang "Fair Harvard."

Mrs. Willoughby had been deeply impressed by the significance of this foregathering of the men who represented, individually and collectively, the standards and the influence of Harvard. The enthusiasm of the diners had struck a responsive chord in her own vivacious spirit, and she had not failed to appreciate at its full value the strength and beauty of the idea that ran through all the speeches — the exhortation to maintain the high standard of civic duty demanded by the inspiring, and exacting, traditions of the old college.

"You Harvard men retain in all its purity the New England tradition," she had said. "I liked your address — yes, I liked it very much. But I liked your little introductions of the speakers even more. They were like the stars, that shine quietly

and do not envy the sun its greater opportunities. And I think we like the stars even more than we do the sun — don't you?"

This little trick of deference appealed to Clarke's masculine sense of superiority.

"I have to thank you for a most delightful evening," she had said. "My boy must go to Harvard."

The next morning, Mrs. Willoughby had gone back to Toronto, to rejoin her children. She had asked him not to go to the station to see her off, as he wished to do; and her request had puzzled and disappointed him, though he had acquiesced with a readiness of compliance which he felt that he could never withhold from her, however unnecessarily exacting her demands might seem. She had, however, granted without hesitation his request to be allowed to write to her, and during the intervening weeks they had engaged in a correspondence which had been to Clarke an unfailing wellspring of delight. And now, in a few hours, he was to see her, to hear again her musical speech, to feel the touch of her hand, to live a little while in that strange exaltation to which her near presence seemed always to raise him.

He reached Toronto as the night was setting in. He had just time to dress comfortably for dinner.

In one of the parlors of the hotel he found Mrs. Willoughby and the children awaiting him. The fine air of almost deferential regard for his approval with which she presented them to him impressed him as the sincerest and best compliment that had ever been rendered him. And it was a pleasure to meet such children. Ernest was, as his mother had described him, a tall, manly chap of thirteen, with a light complexion, tawny hair, and a more serious expression than is common to boys of his age. He seemed to feel the responsibility of his position as the oldest male member of the family, and therefore properly to be regarded as its head. He took Clarke's hand with a firm, strong clasp, and a mingled modesty and assurance that pleased the visitor greatly.

Alice was like her mother. Her hair and skin were darker than her brother's. She was slim and graceful; and on being introduced, she curtseyed in English fashion. The children were delightfully free from the modern self-assertiveness that so often reverses the old-fashioned idea of the superior

right of their elders to attention, and they were also pleasantly advanced beyond the harsh dictum of an earlier generation that children should always be seen and not heard.

Clarke studied them swiftly in those first, important moments. He was extremely anxious to establish himself in their good graces, and he knew that Mrs. Willoughby hoped just as sincerely that they might make a wholly favorable impression on him. He felt immediately sure that he and the little girl would become good friends without difficulty, but of the boy he was not quite so certain. There was a quiet reserve about the lad that made Clarke wonder if he were definitely guarding against the possibility of conferring the gift of his friendship too soon upon one who might possibly usurp the place he felt to be rightfully his—the place of protector, if not as yet provider, that had been left vacant by the death of his father. Clarke did not make the mistake of underestimating the boy's capacity for understanding a situation and formulating a course of conduct for himself. He knew that to attempt openly to win the friendship of this boy would be a sure way to defeat

his own purposes. He must simply wait for Ernest to come to him. It would not be easy, but it was the only way.

As he passed down the long dining hall with his tall hostess at his side and the children following, Clarke thanked Heaven as he never before had thought of doing for the height of figure it had given him, and for the manly proportioned breadth of his shoulders. It was impossible to make that progress without being pleasantly conscious of the interested glances of the people seated at the tables. To act as escort to this tall, darkly beautiful woman was no slight test of a man's self-possession, and fitness of appearance. And it was an innocent vanity that made Clarke enjoy it almost as if it had been a personal triumph, even here among strangers.

At the table, opposite Mrs. Willoughby, with the children on either side between them, Clarke played paterfamilias, and enjoyed it thoroughly.

"What a pleasant place for your temporary home," he remarked. "It is just English enough in atmosphere to be attractive, and has all the American comforts. May I ask how you came to settle in Toronto?"

"A friend recommended it as the one place where Ernest could find a school conducted on the Rugby plan, both in methods of instruction and in discipline; and Alice, too, could have the advantage of a girls' school like those in England. They say the English schools are equal to ours in all respects, and superior in some; for instance, in the training in deportment, which I consider as important as mathematics or history."

Clarke smiled at Ernest, and the boy responded.

"It gives a fellow the finest kind of training," he said. "I 'm 'way ahead of the chaps of my age back home. We have jolly sport, with drill, and soccer and rugger. Cricket isn't half so slow, either, the way these fellows play it. And isn't it odd, one of our best boys is named Tom Brown. We drill with real guns, too. That's the best thing about it. They are twenty-twos, and we have target practice."

"Mr. Clarke can well understand your enjoyment of that, Ernest," said Mrs. Willoughby; "you know, he is a famous sportsman, and no doubt he can tell you some good stories about his adventures."

"Have you shot big game, sir?" asked the boy, his eyes bright with curious interest.

"Yes," said Clarke, "I have hunted in South America, in our own West, and in British Columbia—in fact pretty much everywhere that game can be found on this side of the world. Some day I hope to do Africa and India. How would you like to go on a hunting trip with me, some time?"

"That would be great fun," the boy exclaimed. "But I should like to hear some of your stories, right now."

"I should like to hear them, too," said Alice. "If they are not too cruel," she added. "I like to hear about adventures, even if I am only a girl, but I don't like to think of the animals getting shot—unless they are *very* wild and dangerous."

"Mr. Clarke will have to get up a ladies' edition of some of the stories for us, little daughter," said Mrs. Willoughby. "Some day we shall hear them together; but now it is time for you young folks to be at your evening lessons."

Turning to Clarke, she said: "They always spend an hour before bed-time with their books. We have a splendid governess, who has a wonderful knack of making study

interesting. She goes over the day's work with them each evening, and is remarkably effective in making their class instruction 'stick.'"

As Ernest and Alice went off to the family apartment, their mother said:

"They are bright children, and stand high at school, but I think they are perfectly normal; I mean, normally lively — mischievous and gay."

"They are fine children," said Clarke. "Bright, jolly, full of fun and good spirits — and wonderfully well trained. You should be a proud mother, Mrs. Willoughby!"

"Indeed, I am," she replied; and by the light in her eyes, he saw that his enthusiastic appreciation of the children's virtues had scored. Besides satisfying the natural mother-pride, he had gratified the beautifully naïve craving for praise that he counted one of her most adorable qualities.

The children gone, they two sat and talked, in the pleasant half-isolation of a cosy corner of the hotel parlor.

"Really," said Mrs. Willoughby, "while the children's education was an important factor in my decision to come here, it was

not the principal one. They could have done just as well in the schools of our own East. But the situation at Topeka was becoming intolerable. I had taken care of my husband all through his illness, and was pretty well worn out at the end."

"You must have been," said Clarke. "Is n't it curious, how paths so widely separated as were yours and mine at that time should since have crossed, and joined?"

She smiled brightly.

"It was not only the physical strain," she went on, "but the wear and tear of nerves. I was surrounded by those who were not at all friendly to me, and in the midst of vulgar intrigue. It was the worst possible place for the children. They were constantly hearing talk about money, and social position — everything except what healthy, innocent young people ought to hear. So I just decided to run away."

"It was the wisest thing you could have done, and you seem very comfortably settled here. But do you not find it lonely, with the children gone all day?"

"Sometimes I wish I could have them with me every minute," she said. "But it would not do for them, for Ernest espe-

cially, to be kept too closely at home. They have their own little interests, and I do not mean to dictate every thought and act of their lives."

"That is the commonest of parental errors," said Clarke. "You are to be congratulated as possessor both of the knowledge and of what is still more rare, the ability to regulate your conduct by it. But how do you occupy your time through the day; have you friends here?"

"At first, it was delightful just to be alone. I rested, and enjoyed the peace and quiet, the freedom from the clash and clatter of those utterly selfish folk at Topeka. It was almost like being a nun, those first weeks in Toronto; I spent a good deal of time in meditation, and found it refreshing and restorative."

"And then," suggested Clarke, "as you regained your normal strength and mental comfort? You see, I am frankly curious, and ready to stretch the definition of friendship to make it include a good deal of questioning. Can you put up with it?"

"What could be easier? Of course, as I began to look about more, I found various interests to concern myself with. A woman

has always the shops, you know, and church. Then there was a course of public lectures at the University on 'The Religious Motive in English Literature.' They were given by Professor Hargrave, of Oxford. I attended the course, and enjoyed the lectures and also profited by them greatly."

"I know Hargrave, by reputation," said Clarke. "He is said to be a fine scholar."

"A very human one, too," she commented. "But when I first met him, he was, oh, such a homesick body! It was almost funny to see him, he was so complete a victim; one thinks of a giant of intellect as being immune to the common afflictions. Really, it was pathetic, and I undertook to do what I could to comfort him. He had dinner with us two or three times, and he took us all to the Ice Carnival."

"That ought to have cured him," said Clarke.

"It is best to be perfectly frank and I shall be so. The cure was so complete that the patient became the test of the physician's endurance. The Professor has been rather persistent in his attentions. I don't suppose there is anything to be done, but it is a relief to have told you about it."

"And as the tale ends it is a relief to hear it," he commented, somewhat humorously, "although I suppose I ought to feel a measure of sympathy for the Professor."

The conversation took another turn, and shortly after the children appeared and Clarke bade the family good night.

The next day, Sunday, he went to church with the family in the morning, and in the afternoon drove through the parks of the city. It was, for Clarke, a memorable ride. Sitting beside this beautiful woman, he felt her personality every moment of the way as he had never imagined such a companionship could be felt. Once they left the carriage for a minute, to enjoy a roadside view; and as Mrs. Willoughby took the hand he proffered to assist her in alighting, it seemed to him he could never let it go. Laughing to cover the earnestness of his feeling, he told her so. She smiled, and uttered only a word of playful protest; but she gave his hand a little pressure more eloquent than words.

When Clarke went back to Boston and his work, he carried with him happy memories and a strengthened conviction of the permanence of this new relationship.

CHAPTER IV

A MONTH later, and Chester Clarke was expecting a visitor from Toronto. When he himself had been a visitor there, it was winter. Now the season was changing, and with the vernal joys had to be counted the near approach of her gracious presence.

No wonder the doves on the Common put forth their brighter iris, and the human cooers graced the benches. The Frog Pond had been cleaned and flooded with the necessary number of quarts of fresh water. The swan boats in the Public Garden had been brought out and recommissioned for their summer's work; the pansy beds had been set in readiness for their annual blooming at the feet of Washington, where the Father of his Country patiently bestrides his impetuous steed. The Sacred Cod, as if revivified by secretly administered doses of grandmotherly sulphur and molasses, gleamed in every scale with more ineffable effulgence. It was spring in Boston; not

the irrepressible, effervescent, songful spring of softer climes — but spring as Boston knows it.

Chester Clarke shared the invigorating impulse with the rest of the Boston microcosm; and with more reason, because for whom else had the warming days so great a joy in store?

During the weeks the letters that had passed from Boston to Toronto, and from Toronto to Boston, had been steadily frequent, and increasingly intimate. They had not yet become fervent; but they were affectionate.

His letters had been written always in perfectly conventional terms — but they were founded upon the fact that he was deeply in love, and upon the conviction that his love was known and, in some measure at least, reciprocated. It had now become his settled, and avowed, purpose to marry Mrs. Willoughby just as soon as he could remove whatever obstacles might be upraised in the path of his determination.

And her letters to him? She had written, fully and frankly and with perfect trust, of her own daily experiences, of the children's work and play, of the news that came from

the West, of her plans for the future. She had spoken of Alice's frequent mention of him; but of Ernest she said less. Ernest, he knew, would be an important factor in his problem. He felt sure the boy liked him, as a man, and would be ready to admit him to his friendship. But the boy was so zealous — even jealous — a guardian of his mother, so proud of his position as head of the fatherless family, that Clarke could not imagine him giving ready acquiescence to his — Clarke's — or any other man's intention to marry Mrs. Willoughby. He knew that she would never wholly consent to any man's suit for her hand and heart if Ernest, growing older all the time, and more entitled to a voice in family affairs, opposed. He admired the boy's high spirit, and he saw clearly how important it was to win him over. But the boy's opposition, if such there was to be, could not be overridden. Ernest was "all boy," but in some respects much older than his years. This was one of those obstacles which one surmounts only by going around them. From her later letters he had gathered that the situation at Topeka was not satisfactory to her; that something was disturbing her, and making her restless in

her peaceful Canadian retreat. She was planning, he had perceived, to leave Toronto; or, if not yet definitely planning a hegira, she was tending strongly in that direction.

And so, gratified by her unrestricted confidences and eager to be of assistance, he had thrown convention aside and had written her suggesting that she come to Boston for a few days before going back to Topeka. He might be able to advise her, he had written, and nothing could make him happier. His engagements were such that he would not be able to go north again, but they could easily arrange a meeting in Boston; and, besides, he was entitled to a return visit.

In reply, she had written, with characteristic frankness, that she had considered his suggestion and would accept it; she would send the children on to Topeka in care of their governess, and would come to Boston as soon as they were on their way West.

And now, with spring just beginning to warm the land and stir anew the hearts of men, she was coming! It was a fine evening, with soft air and clear skies, when at last the reward of patience came and Clarke went to the North Station. It was a great

moment for him when the train from the North rolled in.

He hurried down the platform, and was at the car step as she descended. As she saw him waiting there her face brightened with that wonderful smile of hers, and as he grasped her hand she said, with an undisguised pleasure that was most precious to him, "Oh, Mr. Clarke! How glad I am to see you! As we passed through the suburbs, and then as the lights of the city began to flash by, I became almost frightened—it seemed so dreadful to think that something might have happened to keep you from coming to meet me!"

"And I," said Clarke, "would have been in a panic if you had not been on this train. I should have imagined the most appalling things. Reason might have told me that any little untoward incident could have detained you, that there would surely be a telegram explaining the delay—and yet, a fearful imagination would have outvoiced all the promptings of reason, and I should have worried terribly."

In a moment Clarke had arranged for the care of Mrs. Willoughby's luggage, and in a moment more they were sitting side by side

in a cab. It was the first time in all their acquaintance that they had been alone, together, in perfect privacy!

The beautiful woman who sat beside him had come to him, defying the tyranny of social convention. Why? Suppose he could not say, as he would have wished to say, "Because she loves me." No one could challenge his right to say, "Because she trusts me!"

Every atom of chivalry in his being responded to the situation. How he would have liked to caress her! Yet the very elements that had entered into and had brought about the situation forbade it. It only remained for him as he felt the thrill of her presence to modulate the exultation in his voice, and keep himself within the bounds of "propriety"—to reaffirm his pleasure at seeing her, and to ask a dozen commonplace questions.

Clarke had engaged an apartment for her at the Sympatica on Commonwealth Avenue. He had spent several hours in selecting it; among many possibilities, this was perfection. The parlor was not too large to be cosy, and was decorated and furnished in the best of taste. The windows opened

upon the Avenue. The nights were still pretty sharp, and an open fire burned cheerfully in the grate. The table was laid for dinner for two, and in the centre of it a vase of La France roses was gloriously beautiful.

Clarke did not ask her if she liked it. He knew she would.

"How cosy! How homelike!" she exclaimed. "What beautiful roses! How thoughtful of you!"

Clarke had planned the dinner and it proved a great success. Its crowning joy came when, as they reached the end, he lighted a cigarette and watched this beautiful woman pour the coffee.

She asked whether he would have two lumps of sugar or one. There was domesticity for you—the dream of the bachelor made real! Then with an arch smile, she passed him his cup as if quite cognizant of the thoughts that ran through his mind.

A little later Mrs. Willoughby asked if she might be excused to change her travelling dress for something more comfortable. "I know you want me to feel quite at home," she said.

Clarke placed an easy chair before the fire and, lighting a cigar, looked over the

Transcript while he waited, like a true Bostonian.

When she came back, and stood before him, she seemed as one "confessing the goddess in her walk," so lovely was her presence and so fitting to the part the filmy thing she wore. It was of soft material, cut low at the throat and falling in classic lines from a loose girdle high at the waist.

"Do you like my selection?" she asked.

"Like it!" he exclaimed. "Like it? I more than like it! It is charming—I can hardly believe you to be anything but a Greek goddess, come to make our Boston the Athenian paradise we pretend it is."

Pleased with the compliment, she said:

"Foolish man! You behold no goddess, Greek or Bostonian—but just a very tired American woman, afflicted with a traveller's headache. And she would like to lie down on this couch and rest; and you may sit beside her, and talk to her if you will."

Clarke jumped out of his chair.

"Do let me make you comfortable," he said. "How selfish of me, to forget, in my enjoyment of our reunion, that you must be quite worn out after your long journey."

He placed a pillow for her, he turned out

the electric jet on the wall above her, leaving the room in a more subdued light. Then he stood looking down at her, as she closed her eyes and pressed her hand to her forehead.

"Perhaps I can help you," he said. "I have often relieved a headache by stroking the temples. My dear mother used to say I had a healing hand."

"May I try?" he asked, attempting to keep his voice from betraying the eagerness of his desire.

She answered with a smile, and just the suggestion of a nod of assent. He ran his fingers across her forehead and temples and through the masses of her hair. Conversation grew halting, then ceased altogether.

Again and again she opened her eyes, as if resisting the drowsiness that descended upon her, then the heavy lids fell—and she was asleep.

Clarke sat and watched her. Her breathing became deep and regular. How lovely she seemed, how sweet, how pure; and how she trusted him! Her trust was well founded on his love. He rose, cautiously crossed the room, took up an afghan and spread it over her.

He bent over her, gently, carefully; and touched her forehead softly with his lips. Then he took his hat and coat and tiptoed out of the room.

The next morning, shortly before ten o'clock, Clarke stopped, on his way to the office, to pay his compliments to Mrs. Willoughby and to arrange a programme for the day.

She apologized for her rudeness in falling asleep and neglecting her caller. Clarke gave back apology for apology, saying that he must have been terribly dull, thus to "put her to sleep."

"You did put me to sleep," she said, "and it was the very best thing anyone could have done for me. I was so tired, what with the train ride and the worry I had been through; and it was so refreshing to sleep, without feeling any sense of anxiety. I woke just before midnight, and after saying my prayers went to bed, my headache gone, and such a perfect peace in my heart as I had not enjoyed for some time."

"I am glad you had a good night," said Clarke.

Instead of replying with a commonplace of conversation, she gave Clarke one of those

flashing insights into the depths of her nature which repeatedly confirmed and enlarged his regard of her as a most wonderful woman.

"Mr. Clarke," she said, "the night hours are to me the dearest of all. I think when the noises of the day have subsided, and the night draws close about us, our spirits are freed, our powers expand, and we are more at one with the soul of the universe, nearer to God. I suppose"—her mind always tended to give even to such speculations a practical application—"I suppose that is why the Catholic Church, and to some extent the Episcopal, have masses at such hours as seem to most Protestants—well, say unreasonable."

"Unreasonable?" Clarke repeated the word, with interrogative inflection. "The word seems to me to fit the case so perfectly that I cannot quite make out why you emphasized it so oddly."

"Why—don't you see? It has a very special fitness, as I used it. Reason should have no place in religion!"

Somewhat surprised, Clarke said that *he* would not care for a religion that was not built upon the bed rock of reason.

"Oh, no!" she said. "You are wrong! Religion is all faith and love—and faith comes of concentration upon the Infinite—and our finite minds come closer to the Everlasting Power at night. Don't you see what a chain it makes?"

"A chain of logic," said Clarke. "And logic is reason! But," he hastened to add, "your idea of faith is too beautiful, too purely lovely, to be assailed with rude masculine arguments."

"And we are not going to argue the case of Reason *versus* Faith this beautiful morning, are we? Let us each make some concession, and say that reason should take its light from faith, and faith gain greater strength from reason."

Then, with one of her charmingly swift transitions from grave to gay, she asked:

"Well, sir, what have you planned for this lovely day? Surely so true a knight will not let his lady languish—but you must not let my presence intrude upon your professional duties!"

"My professional duties end," said Clarke, "at four o'clock on ordinary days, but an hour earlier on special days, like this; and at three I shall call for you, and after a

good, long drive through the country we shall dine at the Touraine."

"And this evening?" she asked.

"This evening," he said gravely, "is reserved for our consultation. You said, you know, you were anxious to 'consult' me."

"Splendid," she said. "But all the time The Law is waiting, and I do not propose to incur its wrath by keeping you another minute. So, au revoir!"

And Clarke went to work with a light heart.

CHAPTER V

PROMPTLY at three o'clock Clarke knocked at the door of Mrs. Willoughby's apartment. As he entered, she stood by the mantel-shelf, facing him. Her eyes were bright with anticipation. The mid-afternoon sunlight, streaming into the room, fell full upon her—and her bold figure and dark coloring stood the test as a daintier form and fairer complexion might not have done.

"You are punctual, Mr. Clarke," she said; "and I am ready."

Then her radiant smile changed to a look of wonder, and this in turn to one of comprehension and joy, for Chester Clarke's emotions, long pent up behind the dam reared by his chivalrous will, had burst forth, and stormed over him, bearing away like foam on a flooding stream all his stern resolves. Mind yielded at last to heart, as in the end it does for normally constituted folk; and, crossing the room in three steps, he clasped the lovely woman in his arms,

kissing her, passionately. He kissed her mouth—her eyes—her hair.

She did not resist. She did not move, nor speak.

At length he gave over, and, holding her close, with her head resting against his shoulder, he said: "Tell me! Tell me that you love me. Louise—you do! You must!"

She did not speak. He saw that her eyes, so close to his, were veiled, and in each stood a tear. He kissed them away.

She opened her eyes, she raised them to his. How tired they looked—but trusting, brimming full with love. She need not have spoken a word to carry her response. Her pledge was visibly recorded in her eyes. But she did speak—not timidly, not boldly, but with the best sincerity of a woman grown, a woman who knows her will, a woman who is won, and happily yields, without pretence of reservation.

"Yes, I love you," she said; and again the rain of kisses fell.

"And you will marry me, dear one?" His voice did not tremble, but his hands were cold. "You will be my wife? Oh, Louise, my darling, I lay before you all

that I am, all that I hope ever to be! Thank God for sending you into my life! Tell me that you will stay there forever — and let me care for you, let me love you. Will you, my beautiful Louise?"

She still let herself rest close to him. She looked up at him confidingly; and yet, her eyes reflected doubt. What could it be? Surely, she could not question the genuineness, the permanence, of his love! Surely, she must know that back of the sudden declaration lay a long history of love! Whatever the doubt was, he would kill it.

"Tell me, dear," he said softly, "tell me why your eyes are clouded, when your heart, I know, is filled with joy?"

"Oh, Chester," she said, "I cannot promise you just yet: I want to, I really do; I love you, you know I love you! But there are so many things that stand in the way — I must not be selfish, there are others to be thought of first: before myself — yes, even before you! Their happiness must come first. Oh, Chester, I am in such trouble! Don't ask me the great, the wonderful question now. Wait! Is it not enough that I tell you that I love — oh, I do love you! Isn't that enough for now?"

"Dearest, it is everything — almost everything, and I can wait, if you say we must wait. But tell me, once more, you love me!"

"Chester, I do, I love you more than life, more than anything — except duty to my children. They must come first; but my heart is yours, yours forever."

"You make me happy, very happy, almost perfectly happy. But now you must know that if there are obstacles that stand in the way, I shall be always beside you, to help you overcome them. If you are in trouble, I shall always claim the right you have now given me, to share it with you."

As by a single impulse, they moved to the divan and sat down together; Clarke still holding both her hands in his. Now and then he raised them to his lips.

"Now, dear," he said, "tell me — tell me everything. I only know parts of the story; tell me the rest. I cannot help you as I wish to unless I know every detail."

"It is a long story," she said; "too long to tell now. But it is a relief to be able to talk to you without reserve. I have always trusted you more than anyone else, but this is different; now there is not a detail I would wish to conceal from you, not a fact, how-

ever private and personal, I would hesitate to tell you about. I want to tell you everything, I want your help and protection. Say what you will, let her be courageous as she may—and yet the woman who has to fight her own battles in the world is to be pitied; a woman alone is so—so incomplete!"

Clarke blessed her for the brave humor that refused to let its light be dimmed by the shadow of any trouble.

"And I," she added, "have been fighting—all alone—my own battles, and those of my children."

He drew her to him, kissed her, and said: "Dear, that chapter in your life is closed, those difficulties shall not oppress you again. They are mine now— and I will take care of them!"

She thrilled to the consciousness of his strength. She put her hand over his.

"Heart's desire!" she said; not tremulously, but with that decision which he admired in her.

"Heart's satisfaction," he exclaimed; and kissed her again.

"And now, my dear one," she said, "we must come back to earth. See—we have

kept the carriage waiting nearly an hour. Come—help me with my wrap."

"I shall tell you the whole story tonight," she said, as they went out.

That was a happy drive!

CHAPTER VI

CLARKE'S unpremeditated proposal had made it more than ever necessary for these two people to attain to perfect understanding of what had now become their common cause. The "consultation" was now not merely important and desirable, it was indispensable and inevitable. Therefore after dinner they returned to the apartment, and made themselves comfortable in preparation for a long and serious talk. Clarke savored with unalloyed delight the domesticity of the situation. Leaning back in his roomy armchair, he lighted a cigar, and said:

"Now for the story! And you shall tell it in your own way; as we say in court, without interruption and without leading questions from counsel."

"No — please!" she said; "that would be too much like the Judge's solemn charge to the jury. I would much rather have you ask questions and give suggestions as we go along."

"Very well," said Clarke; "but, for my part, I expect to do much more listening than talking."

"Where shall I begin?" she asked.

"You have told me something about your married life," he hinted.

"Oh, yes; and I shall tell you more. My husband loved me—in his own way, which was not the way a woman loves to be loved! It is because of that very fact that I can talk about these things so impersonally. That kind of love—the love given by a man devoted almost exclusively to business: perhaps it would be unfair to say that it is not love, but certainly it is not to be identified with that mingling of souls which alone can satisfy the need of a woman's nature. It is an impersonal thing. The woman who gets that, and nothing more, from her husband, may be comfortable, but she cannot be happy. She has a husband, a protector, a provider, but not a mate. Such a husband is only a substitute for the missing half of her being."

"She may find the other half, later, in another man," said Clarke; "she may reap happiness in a field of tragedy. We lawyers see so much of that! But—"

"I was getting into generalities, and away from my own particular story. Well: It was all business, business, business, with Mr. Willoughby. Life was trademarked and dollarmarked, and gauged by percentages —a thing of principal and interest, markets and materials. That might well enough have been his occupation part of the time, possibly even the greater part; but the remaining part should have been mine! I would not have interfered with the business. It would have made me happy to help in it, in however insignificant a way—just to share in the worries and to rejoice in the successes.

"I mean to be perfectly fair," she said, "and not give a wrong impression. It is not easy, and you must first of all be sure that you understand perfectly that Mr. Willoughby was never for a moment intentionally unkind to me. He was very proud of what he called my beauty, of my social successes, of my music, my public appearances; but it always seemed to me a pride in *property*. I am not one of your 'clinging vine' women; but, like any other normal woman, I did, and do, want sympathy—understanding—true companionship; and these things

were not mine. There is the fact, without coloring."

"You have reported it wonderfully well," said Clarke; "and good reporting is more rare than artistic interpretation."

He watched, meditatively, the thin column of smoke that rose straight from the tip of his cigar, then broke and spiralled with the slight movement of the air. Then he said:

"Our New England Longfellow — who may perhaps, as they say, survive only in the provinces, but who seems to me to have combined a remarkable measure of sheer human feeling with his Maine character and his Cambridge culture — says, of woman, in the Indian epic:

"'As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman:
Though she bends him, she obeys him;
Though she draws him, yet she follows —
Useless each without the other.'

"Elementary, perhaps — but rather satisfactory, I should say, as an accommodation of the two views: the characteristically masculine and the characteristically feminine. But that is quite in the abstract, and we

need to be concrete in our consideration of things just now."

"Yes, Mr. Lawyer," Mrs. Willoughby said, smiling. "And I should like to know who is sidetracking the story, now!"

"Mea culpa, mea culpa! Please forgive me; I promise to do better from now on!"

"Well; we were speaking of my social successes, as the queer people who write the 'society column' would say. Can't you see what effect those successes would have on the other Willoughbys? They were jealous, they envied me—really! And, oh, the narrowness of that community! Every breeze that blew carried gossip, and sometimes even scandal. It was like what someone said of Christiania. Who was it? Well—never mind; I have forgotten the authorship, but the sentences persist in memory; they meant so much to one situated as I was. They run this way: 'Oh great and little City! You are great enough with your thousand beaks to peck out the eyes of your hapless victim. You are not great enough to afford a place in which he may hide himself!'"

"That's clever!" Clarke exclaimed, "but is it just? Does the criticism apply to the whole urban middle West?"

"One would, of course," she said, judicially, "make some exceptions. I have often thought about it, because I have been so much in contact with it. And this, it seems to me, is the explanation—I am always looking for explanations; I want, like Budge, or was it Toddy, to see the wheels go round: the illiberal views which the settlers of the Western Reserve, as they called it, brought—from New England, sir!—spread from Ohio to the Rockies. You have outgrown them, here in the East; but out there they persist, and are quite as marked as they ever were on the Atlantic coast."

She warmed to the subject. She had known the sting of this illiberality—and the burned child, if he be a child of spirit, not only dreads but hates the fire. She ran on:

"No theatres of any standing—no high class opera—no hotels or restaurants where a gentleman can take a lady to dine alone without incurring the penalty of comment."

"Thou shalt not smoke in the same room where thou dost eat," Clarke interposed, blowing, with huge relish, a great cloud of the aromatic fumes of Vuelta Abajo. He was enjoying life.

"You shall not bring me down from the clouds! I mean to soar—and I assure you, it is the wings of truth that sustain me! Church sociables for the frivolous—thus far, and no farther! Prayer meeting attendance is the measure of merit in conduct. To be seen talking to a man on the street is to be engaged to him—or, *not* to be engaged, and to be 'compromised.' What is the result? Driven to desperation the *nouveaux riches* indulge in quiet little times of their own, while, perishing of ennui, the young women scatter to the palaces of pleasure in more naïvely 'human' regions. You see them—you see a great deal of them!—at Palm Beach in the winter, at Newport or Narragansett Pier in the summer; in New York for the Horse Show and Grand Opera; and in Europe. They are the people who in the 'Tourist Season' travel 'in pairs' all over amazed—and amused—Europe, where they gain a reputation as 'good sports'—and incidentally pass as typical Americans."

Although Clarke had listened to this arraignment with keen interest, he showed by his manner that he did not endorse it in all its details.

"It does sound pretty savage, no doubt," she said, quietly, noting his attitude, "but it is true—I assure you it is. Perhaps it isn't just what a woman ought to say, no matter how true it is; but it has all played a very large, and a very unhappy, part in my life."

Clarke answered thoughtfully:

"It must have been bitter for you. It is remarkable that you have come out of it all unscathed."

"In a sense, I have not. These things were all so unpleasant to me that I withdrew more and more from the social companionship I craved, and became something of a recluse. And that was, mentally, most unhealthy. And it was hard to keep the children from being affected by it all. I had to *fight* for them!"

"Yes, I can imagine it; and I can see now, much more clearly than before, how pleasant the peaceful retirement in Canada must have been to you."

For a few moments they were silent, each thinking things that did not fall easily from the lips. Mrs. Willoughby was the first to speak.

"Now," she said, "let us get back to my

own story, which I wish you to know in every detail.

"The story comes now to the 'villain,' without whom no story is complete.

"John Sharp was Father Willoughby's confidential adviser. He presented himself as a graduate of an Eastern university, and made a great display of his legal training and knowledge — which I always thought was more the work of his own very efficient imagination than of official diplomas or actual practice. But he was clever, terribly clever; and somehow he had managed to worm himself into Old Man Willoughby's confidence. That was Father Willoughby's name among the people of our own and several other States," she explained.

"John Sharp had been at the Works nearly twenty-five years. He knew all the patent and trade secrets of the business, and the knowledge gave him a most dangerous power, which he well knew how to use to his own selfish advantage. Oh, he is a dangerous man! And the more dangerous, because he wears with such artless grace the mantle of his respectability.

"He had Father Willoughby's unqualified confidence. The old gentleman trusted

him implicitly — and, I think, feared him a good deal, too. When I entered the life of the Willoughby family, this man Sharp was strongly intrenched. He was the go-between in Father Willoughby's dealings, whether with the family or with the army of employees at the Works. He was a dark, silent, uncommunicative man."

"A deacon in the church, I suppose," Clarke suggested.

"Well, yes — that is about the way a man would express it. And now, the next step. When Father Willoughby died, he left his whole fortune, unconditionally, to Mother Willoughby; and he made John Sharp executor of the will."

"That was a hard blow to Sharp!" Clarke commented facetiously.

"You see," Mrs. Willoughby continued, "he is still after that fortune. The stakes are high, and I believe he will play a desperate game — anything to win.

"When the family rebels, he reminds them that if the Government knew one-half of the violations of law that the Company has been guilty of, there would be no Willoughby millions to worry about. And, he tells them, sometimes with unctuous virtue

and sometimes with malice — for he varies between those two characters — that *he* knows, not one-half the story, but all! So he has tamed their proud spirits, and holds them, as the saying goes, in the hollow of his hand. And it is a hand that is ready, when the right moment comes, to close upon them with a deadly grip, or to clench itself fistwise and strike a cruel blow."

"I suppose," said Clarke thoughtfully, "the first step in such a man's scheme would be to develop, and, when the time comes, to exercise an undue influence over the old lady's — over Mrs. Willoughby's mind."

"Yes — you have hit it exactly! He has a terrible power over her. Any appeal made to her by a member of the family is referred to 'John,' as she always calls him. They all hate him — and they all fear him."

"Again, if I may hazard a supposition — as a lawyer," said Clarke, "such a man would not have refrained from trying to gain, and exert, an influence over you, the mother of old Mrs. Willoughby's grandchildren."

"You have gone straight to the heart of the story — the part I have been leading up to, and dreading to arrive at. But your

perfect understanding makes it much easier to tell — and I want you to know the facts just as I know them. Here they are:

"After my husband's death John Sharp began to visit my house frequently — always making a pretence of some business matter to be discussed. This was unpleasant; but what made me hate and fear him was his pretended fondness for Ernest and Alice. When that sort of a man tries to be nice to children, he needs watching! No such feeling can be honest with him. Trust a mother to know who her children's friends are!"

What a wonderful voice she had! Without altering her telling of the story in the slightest detail that would have been apparent to an uninvolved listener, she made it perfectly plain to Clarke, by the inflection of her rich tones, that she well knew that *he* was the true friend of her two children. He welcomed the tribute, as just as it was generous. She continued:

"He began by pretending affection for the children. He ended — by proposing marriage to me! He intimated that the children's interest in their grandfather's millions was involved. I refused him, of course! — as graciously as I could, for I

really fear the man, and do not care to antagonize him a bit more than I can help, while preserving self-respect. He went away — actually threatening us."

She paused. The strain was great. She resumed:

"After that he became more constant than ever in his attentions to Mother Willoughby. I believe he would have tried to marry her, old as she was — but even he did not quite dare go so far as that!

"One day Mother Willoughby dropped a bombshell in the midst of a family council by calmly announcing Lucy's engagement to him."

"Lucy?"

"Oh! Haven't I mentioned her? She was the 'queer' one of the family. She kept very close to her mother; seemed lost without her. Whatever her mother said, Lucy did — as instinctively as if it had been the prompting of her own mind that urged her.

"She has no will of her own. Her engagement — it was a cruel thing; I do not see how her mother can ever be forgiven for encouraging it. She *must* have known that she was doing an unmotherly thing.

"So John Sharp was assured of a goodly share in the Willoughby millions, when they should come to be distributed.

"It was the talk of the town. My brothers-in-law even plucked up courage enough to go to their mother about it, but she would give them no satisfaction. I think she was maliciously happy at having them give her the opportunity to do it so officially.

"Well, John Sharp married Lucy — poor girl! — and after the wedding, whenever there was no one to notice it, he leered at me, triumphantly. Now Mother Willoughby is lavishing her money on them — on her poor, simple-minded daughter, and her decidedly not simple-minded new son-in-law.

"Oh, money, money," she cried, "what a trail of wickedness and suffering and sorrow it leaves!"

Then, more quietly, she brought the story to its finish.

"You see how I have had to fight for my children. But there is one more point — a most important one for us: Mother Willoughby could never agree to my marrying again. The mere suggestion would wound her in the one tender spot of her nature. You see, I have been the wife of her best

loved son, her Joseph. He was most like his father, and she loved him most. For anyone who had been her son's wife to love another man—to marry another man—would be, to her, a sacrilege, an iniquity; the betrayal of a sacred bond.

"And then, there is my dear Ernest. Do you know, young as he is, he has actually told me, in so many words, that he is never going to marry—he wishes to love no woman but me. And don't you see the natural corollary? He thinks that as my love satisfies him, so his should be enough for me. Of course, he doesn't understand; how could he? But there is the fact; and Chester dear, you will see how necessary it is for us to be patient, and wait. And," she added, wearily, "in any case I must talk to my father about it."

She had borne the strain bravely, but even her fine fibre had been overtaxed. Now she sat very still.

Clarke arose and, standing beside her, stroked her hair gently, as he said:

"It has been hard for you, but there is a way out, and we shall find it. Don't you know," he said pleadingly, "Love conquers all things?"

CHAPTER VII

MRS. Willoughby spent three days more in Boston, and on the morning of each day Clarke called at her apartment and they arranged a programme for the afternoon and evening. This was a particularly happy period in their history. She lunched with him once at Young's, where the rock of old conservatism refuses to be dislodged by the insistent tide of modern innovation. One afternoon they drove through Boston's lovely and historic suburbs, and they spent an evening at the theatre. But the happiest hours were those they passed quietly alone in the evening.

There was so much to be said, and the apartment savored so much of a home. They talked books: Clarke had not neglected to make the rooms more homelike with the cheery presence of some of the most cherished volumes of his own library.

Among these were some of Kipling's books, with the author's autograph; Clarke had met him at a banquet where the English-

man, bored to death, had gone off into a corner with him, the one man present who could talk of guns and game, tell a good story of his own, and listen, with appreciation properly placed, to another fellow's. Clarke read to Mrs. Willoughby the "Recessional."

"There," said he, after a moment's silence when the last full tones of his sympathetic rendering had ceased to vibrate, "there is a poem with more of beauty than a whole volume of modern lackadaisical lyrics—more strength than a hundred 'free verse' smiths can hammer out on a hundred iron anvils—more real man's religion than there is in a four hundred page hymn book."

"What a contrast," said Mrs. Willoughby, "to 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic.' Why do we Americans insist on setting our emotions to lilting measures?"

"We are growing in grace," said Clarke. "I think it is a perception of the defect, and an honest desire to do better, that has led our later verse writers away from the old, jingly forms. In crude reaction, they swing too far, and accept grotesqueries as evidence of strength, uncharted wanderings in chaos as proof of superiority to conventional rules.

It is the excess of revolution. There will be a counter-revolution. The radicals will pass, unmourned. With moderated reaction, the pendulum will at last come to a halt at the mid-dial mark, and we shall have advanced by so much. We shall retain the beauties of form, the difficult simplicity of that perfect art which improves upon nature by concentrating upon nature's best. We shall be masters, not slaves, of rhyme and rhythm. We shall perceive that we have been rebelling against form, when our actual error was a neglect of substance; and we shall produce a literature as great and noble in its simple strength and dignity, adorned with the graces of chastening art, as this mighty nation must surely be destined to place before the world."

"I think," she said, "we may produce a Shakespeare — but it will be long before we have a Shaw."

"Yes; really clever cynicism, I think, comes only with the passing of the peak of a nation's years."

Then the talk drifted into other channels. They compared notes on their travels. Both had seen the Passion Play at Oberammergau in the same month — perhaps they had been

present at the same performance! Both had watched for sunrise on the Rigi. They had attended the Paris Exposition, and had sat under the spell of the wonderful acting of Coquelin in "Cyrano."

"I wonder," Mrs. Willoughby once said, "if we have never met in the course of these comings and goings. Do you suppose we can have been, sometime, somewhere, sitting side by side in an audience, or walking, almost together, through a street in London, or Paris, or Vienna?"

"Like ships that pass in the night? Who knows?" And then:

"No," he said, emphatically, "I do not believe it. We live in a small world, and it is no miracle if two travellers through it cross each other's path a dozen times. But for us, I believe it impossible. My belief in our kinship, mental and spiritual, is such — so clearly defined and substantially formed — that I cannot think it possible for us to have been near one another, without knowing it. When I saw you at the dinner, so few weeks ago! — I knew at once that you were *you,* the rest of *me!* And if I had seen you three years, five years, ten years sooner, do you not think the same knowledge

would have dawned upon me, just as spontaneously? No, my dear—we never were within close contact of each other. And that is stranger than if we had met; so surely, so irrevocably, were we meant for one another."

Whether she believed that or not, she certainly enjoyed hearing him say it. Possibly with serious intent—and, possibly, intending to tease him a little, she said:

"You know, I lived in Boston two seasons. That was some years ago, when I was a girl, and you a very young man. Do you not think you may have passed me in the street—a tall, slender girl, carrying a violin? Do you really think you would have fallen in love with me so—so impetuously, then? You may have been the same man you are now, but I—really, I was a very different person in those days!"

Clarke tried to see this woman of thirty-five, in the full maturity of her beauty, as she must have looked at seventeen. He failed; no image would form upon the screen of his imagination. There is no place in my heart, he told himself, for any other.

He loved her—heart, soul, mind and body—as the whole beautiful harmony of

her being had been formed and matured by the years. He was positive that they had met as it had been ordained from the beginning of time that they should meet, in time's fulness.

CHAPTER VIII

SEVENTY–TWO hours: how swiftly they pass, when Love is watching the clock! The third day came and went, and in the evening of it Mrs. Willoughby started on her journey. Clarke saw her comfortably established in the train, received her final earnest assurance that he should hear from her as soon as she had consulted her father, and then went back to his rooms — to wait.

His patience was not put to too long a test, for there came, even sooner than he could have expected, a letter in which she said:

"MY DEAR LOVE:

"My journey home was without incident. The time passed swiftly, for the hours were filled with such delightful memories of the past three days in Boston. Your tenderness and your love have won me. I know that you will always understand me perfectly; I shall never have to explain to you — and I have been at times so cruelly

misunderstood! I told my father, and he will be glad, indeed he is anxious, to see you. Come at once, and let us know when you will arrive.

"With my heart's best love,

"LOUISE."

Clarke read, and exultantly re-read, this letter. He telephoned for information, and found that he could catch a train that would get him to Topeka the third night out, at eight o'clock. Packing hastily, he hurried to the station, and had just time to send a telegram announcing the probable time of his arrival. He added two happy words: "Ad astra."

On the train, he looked over his fellow passengers, and wondered upon what errands they were bound. They all seemed so composed — so matter-of-fact; their purpose must be hopelessly prosaic and commonplace, compared with his; who at journey's end would learn whether he was, or was not, to marry the most desirable woman in the world.

His own worthiness for so great a boon, his own fitness for such a responsibility would, of course, be searchingly investi-

gated. It was pleasant to be so confident of the outcome. He need not shun the issue, or avoid the test; he could afford to invite it, to challenge it.

The seventeenth century was young when the first Clarke landed in Boston. He had left England, with a price on his head because he had ventured to incur the very human displeasure of a very royal Highness. There was Huguenot blood on his mother's side, and the strain had blended in the years with the Puritan.

His great grandfather had served under Lafayette, and his father under Sherman. He himself had won an honorable position at the bar. He had gained a considerable local reputation as a speaker. His conscience was clear, his honor unstained: no, he need not dread the inquest!

It is doubtful whether Clarke had ever before made such an inventory of his own qualifications. Why should he? His standing in respect of all the terms of eligibility for son-in-lawship had always been one of the things that are taken for granted.

His nature was deeply religious. He stood solidly for the Church as an institution; believing that Protestant New England was

fast becoming pagan, since not one half of the descendants of the Puritans and Pilgrims ever set foot inside of a church door, in one of his public addresses he had asserted with emphasis that its decline and fall would be attended, inevitably, by the decline and fall of the Republic. In some measure he sought to cultivate his spiritual being. He believed it better for a man to build his life upon a religion, however archaic or irrational, than to lack the foundation of faith-formula. One of his favorite quotations was:

"First God made man, then straightway man made God.
What wonder if the tang of that same sod
From whence we issued with a breath should cling
To all we fashion? We can only plod,
Led by a starveling candle, and we sing
Of what we can remember of the road."

No word that Chester Clarke uttered could be rightly understood, no act which he performed could be correctly judged, without reference to the Puritan part of his antecedents. The New England conscience of his paternal ancestors had been graced

but not weakened by the inheritance of another character from his mother's Gallic forebears. The Huguenot influence shone out in his mental processes; the Puritan factor was apparent in his deep, instinctive sense of moral responsibility — that it was instinctive is the important fact. Rochelle might make him, in an hour of suffering, more acutely conscious of every pang; Boston would compel him to suffer in silence, hide his hurt, and go his way without any manifestation of memory for yesterday's heavy strokes of misfortune. The democracy of the Puritan recognized a degree of special dependence upon its men of brains, character, learning and position; and it required of them a specially stoic subordination of personal interests to the duty of man as a member of the community. Where the Huguenot might assume the right to end a life blasted by disappointment, the Puritan would not consider the life his to take — but only his to live out to the appointed end. Probably the two men would be equal in courage; the difference would be a matter of conscience.

And so, as one who had lived up to the best New England traditions, Clarke sped

across the country, with a glad heart and high hopes, to conquer the waiting West.

When at last the train crossed the Missouri River and entered the State of Kansas, Clarke recalled the lines of Whittier, sung by the stout-hearted pioneers as they migrated in the "Fifties" to hold the Territory and its resources for the common weal:

"We go to rear a wall of men
On Freedom's Southern line,
And plant beside the cotton-tree
The rugged Northern pine!

"Uprearing like the Ark of old
The Bible in our van,
We go to test the truth of God
Against the fraud of man."

And this was the country where the woman he was hastening to meet had spent the greater part of her life: a country strange, but now dear, to him. With keen pleasure he scrutinized the landscape. Here and there a patch of sandy desert, not yet conquered; then endless expanse of broad prairie land, rich in the beauty of purple iris and verbena; green oceans of corn and grain billowing away to the far horizon; plantations of

fruit trees and vines, full of luscious promise. A land of plenty, a smiling land; and everywhere, the visible evidence of the genius and thrift of a virile and progressive race.

The train pulled into Topeka three hours behind time. It was nearly eleven o'clock when Clarke descended from his car. There would be no one but a servant to meet him, he supposed, at this late hour.

But he was wrong, for Mrs. Willoughby and Ernest were waiting on the platform. He hurried to meet them, and would have offered his most demonstrative greeting; but Mrs. Willoughby forestalled him.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "here is our traveller! We are so glad to see you, Mr. Clarke. We were about to give you up, when we learned that the train would surely arrive within another twenty minutes. And we Topekans have never been accused of not being hospitable to the stranger that is within our gates."

She spoke with no more and no less warmth than one puts into the words of welcome to the ordinary guest; and Clarke had regarded himself as so very special a visitor! When she turned to the boy and said: "Ernest, you remember Mr. Clarke,

of course?" Clarke felt a pang of something resembling resentment; but it immediately occurred to him that this mingling of cordiality with formality was caused by the presence of the boy, who was still evidently unaware of their relations and whose reconciliation to the installation of a stepfather was still unachieved. Taking the cue, he replied in the conventional manner of a traveller well pleased at reaching his destination.

The other members of the family had retired, and Mrs. Willoughby and Ernest sat with him while he ate the luncheon provided for his refreshment. There was a little colorless talk about his journey and about Topeka; Clarke wondered that Mrs. Willoughby did not find a way to get rid of the boy. Then, despairing of any opportunity to say the things he could not wait to say, he announced his readiness to retire. Ernest showed him to his room.

Clarke was puzzled and hurt. As he undressed, he wondered: Could she possibly fail to realize how his suppressed feelings were straining for expression? Could she not understand his longing to clasp her in his arms? She must, surely, be aware of his

anxiety to hear how her father stood; but she had given no sign of concern.

With a keen sense of disappointment he retired. Sleep came to him that night haltingly. His mind grappled with a problem it could not solve; could hardly even state. Fifteen or twenty minutes passed; a clock outside in the hall struck midnight. The house was dark and still; drowsiness came over him.

Then, as if in a dream, he was aware of a dim light in the room. His door had noiselessly opened and shut. A figure all in white, and carrying a shaded night lamp, stood a moment as if listening, then moved softly across the room to his bedside.

Kneeling there, she said, in a whisper:

"I could not let the night come between us until I had spoken to you, dear — just a word, out of my heart."

"My love, my own love!" was all he said. But as he drew her into his arms, and she rested there, happy and content, they had no need of words.

At length, whispering "Now you must let me go," she gave him one last kiss — the door opened and shut, swiftly and silently, and she was gone.

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning, Clarke awoke refreshed and eager to launch upon the new phase of his Great Adventure. He went out for an early stroll, had walked back to the house, and was mounting the front steps when a tall, elderly gentleman, somewhat portly of figure, came out.

Extending his hand, with an air of combined cordiality and deference, he said: "I am glad to see you, Mr. Clarke. Sorry not to have felt able to sit up and receive you last night. Doubtlessly, my daughter explained. It's Mr. Malsby. I am glad, and proud, to welcome you here."

As their hands clasped in hearty greeting, each man looked squarely into the eyes of the other.

"Take a seat, Mr. Clarke," Malsby said. "The ladies have not come down yet."

Clarke liked the looks of this man, the father of the woman he loved. The deep wrinkles in his forehead, the bulge of the heavy shoulders, the powerful structure of

his hands, all bespoke the man of many battles. The rugged frame showed, slightly but plainly, signs of the wear and tear of hard work. Strength and character were the suggestion given by his appearance.

"You are from Boston, Mr. Clarke," he said, to establish a point of departure for their conversation. "Boston is a grand old city! I have been there several times, and the more I see of it the better I like it—even to the famous baked beans."

He chuckled.

"Yes, Boston is a good town," said Clarke. "It has its peculiarities, however. They say, you know, that any casual gathering of three or four Bostonians resembles a session of the Concord School of Philosophy, and we are supposed to be constantly seeking to hear of some new thing. All the 'isms,' according to common report, originate in the Hub."

"That does seem to be the fact," Mr. Malsby remarked, after half a moment's reflection. Then, pausing the other half of the moment, he said:

"But I don't just see how you make it line up with your conservatism. I always think of Boston as our most conservative

city. For my part, I like the way you stick to your old customs. No outlander seems ever to break through, or climb over, your Chinese Wall."

"Boston has changed, in some respects, with the changing times," replied Clarke. "New people come, and bring new ways. But the inner citadel still resists every assault."

"As long as there is any Boston at all," said Mr. Malsby, "*old* Boston will be the Boston the rest of the country knows and respects." He spoke with conviction.

"I suppose our conservatism is the natural continuation of our English inheritance," said Clarke. "Our institutions, you see, were well established 'in good old Colony times, when we lived under the King.'"

"Well," said the older man, "I'll tell you this: as a Westerner—and there's a good many more like me!—I'd bank, every time, on a real Bostonian. I've met a lot of 'em, in business, first and last! And why would I bank on him? I'll tell you, sir: his credit is solid, because his conservatism keeps him out of trouble. He works hard, and he's thrifty. He never gets drunk, and he never visits a den of iniquity. I don't recall ever

hearing of a Boston wife-beater! He's in on every work of charity and benevolence; seems trained that way from the cradle, and the best thing about you fellows is the way you face the 'chores' of life. I've always found a Boston man a good friend, once I've got to know him."

The reservation was made with just a show of whimsicality.

"You are truly generous with your praise," said Clarke, "and I trust we deserve the high compliment. I have always supposed the rest of the country regarded us as rather narrow and self-satisfied. I once heard a countryman say of the Boston man that three of him could sit on a buggy seat. We are accused of being intellectuals; of lacking the spirit of adventure, and so missing much of the variety and spice of life."

The quoted criticism seemed to rouse the old man's fighting spirit. He took up arms in defence of the maligned city.

"I'm telling you what *I* think," he said; "and I don't get my ideas from anyone else! Your monuments reflect your character. I always stand with my hat off when I read the inscription on your Public Library,

'The Commonwealth requires the education of her citizens as the safeguard to order and liberty,' or that other one on your Soldiers' Monument:

"'To the men of Boston
Who died for their Country
On land and sea
In the war that made the Union whole
Destroyed slavery
And preserved the Constitution.'

"You see I have committed these words to memory. Then there's the Shaw Memorial, as it's called, on the Common opposite the State House, about dying for noble ends.

"We have few monuments out here; we have none with such noble and nobly worded sentiments on them. If this country ever goes to war again, in some great and righteous cause, the young men of New England ought to be the first to rise — after seeing words like those every day of their lives!"

After a moment of silence, Clarke asked:

"Have you had extensive business connections in Boston?"

"Well, yes — I've done a goodish amount of trading in Boston."

A softer look took possession of his strong old face, as he added:

"And I placed my daughter in school there. I was bound that she should have the best musical education that America could give her, so I took her to Boston and placed her at the New England Conservatory of Music."

In the parental pride which he made no attempt to conceal, Clarke saw the opening for which he had been waiting.

"Now, Mr. Malsby," he said, "I came here to speak with you about your daughter —I am in love with her, deeply in love, and I am here to ask your consent to our marriage."

The older man evidently was pleased by the younger man's straightforward presentation of his suit. He answered in the same spirit and manner:

"My daughter has spoken to me. It would be hard for me to refuse her anything—so I'm pretty strongly on your side at the start-out. Besides, I should like to see her happily married before my own time comes—and it's getting near enough now to have to be figured on."

He paused, reflectively.

"You certainly do not look like an invalid," was Clarke's comment.

"Well, anyway, there's the fact that my girl is the kind that's better off married than single. I am very much honored by your interest in her, and I'll do all I can to help you. And you may need some help. There are certain obstacles. Her affairs and those of the children are in a pretty uncertain condition right now, and—"

He stopped short.

"The ladies are coming," he said. "We'll talk it over, later in the day."

They rose to greet Mrs. Willoughby and Mrs. Malsby, who appeared at the door.

CHAPTER X

MRS. Malsby was a lady of medium height, quite a little shorter than her daughter. Her mien was, if not severe, at least uncompromising, and she was dressed in the stiffest of styles. A stage manager engineering a play with Mrs. Willoughby in the leading part would have found in Mrs. Malsby the perfect foil for her daughter's loveliness.

As the party entered the breakfast room Alice and Ernest came in, rosy from an early walk. Ernest said:

"Did you have a good night, Mr. Clarke? Everybody says our air out here makes them sleep better than at home."

But Alice came up to him without a hint of shyness and with the crystal clear honesty of childhood put her warm, strong young arms around him and gave him a hearty kiss.

Mrs. Malsby looked at her daughter. Mrs. Willoughby was smiling.

"That child will never learn manners," the grandmother said. "I do wish you

would teach her not to be so forward, Louise!"

Clarke recalled Mrs. Willoughby's whispered adjuration, "Do be nice to mother!" He said:

"That was the very nicest thing that ever happened to me, Mrs. Malsby. You are to be congratulated on having so dear a little lady for a granddaughter."

Mrs. Malsby replied quite unenthusiastically, and thereafter she spoke seldom and briefly. Clarke could bring forward no topic to which she would respond. He could not think her hostile toward himself, but she certainly preserved an unwavering neutrality. Her natural reserve of manner, he felt sure, was reënforced by a determination to be noncommittal. The situation appealed to his sense of humor: it suggested a very prim lady walking a tightrope.

The visitor permitted himself, without compunction, to analyze this family whose hospitality he was enjoying. It was perfectly fair, for he himself had invited them to analyze him! Let it, then, be give and take! He saw that the father and daughter stood on one side of a sharply drawn line, the mother on the other. While taking his

part in the small talk of the breakfast table, he was reconstructing in his mind the history of this family division. He could imagine a hundred ways in which, while conscientiously endeavoring to mould her daughter to her own views, Mrs. Malsby had driven the child away from her cold self and into the shelter of her father's never-failing sympathy. He thought it would be incorrect and unjust to suppose that Mrs. Malsby loved her daughter less than Mr. Malsby did; but she loved her in a conscientious, measured way, while his affections found free expression in spontaneous response to every appeal, verbal or tacit.

And, as was to be expected, the schism extended to the new generation of Willoughbys. Alice was more like her mother and her grandfather; while Ernest drew naturally to Mrs. Malsby. It was odd to see so strikingly firm an attachment between the severe grandmother and the boy. In their reserved, undemonstrative way they seemed to depend on each other for support against the more impulse-ruled part of the household group.

Throughout the meal the talk ran pleasantly in the rather desultory channels of

breakfast-table conversation; it was only the merest undercurrent, that would probably have been imperceptible to a visitor less intimately concerned with the significant insignificances of the occasion, that enabled Clarke to form these conclusions so positively. The meal finished, the children ran off to feed their pets; Mrs. Malsby excused herself and Mrs. Willoughby said, "I will go with you, mother, so that father and Mr. Clarke can enjoy their morning smoke without interruption."

The two men settled themselves comfortably in the snug little sanctum at a corner of the house. A certain tensity of mind was felt by each in himself, and was perceived by each in the other. It was not the strain of coming battle, for they had already discovered a community of favorable disposition; but now they were to deal in detail with a decision momentous for each. Clarke felt that he stood on the near bank of his Rubicon, and the hour of crossing was at hand. Mr. Malsby opened the conference.

"This is business, Mr. Clarke," he said, "and there's just one way to talk business."

"Straight," said Clarke.

"Right! Well, then: I have a question to ask you before we get down to details. But it's a question that needs an explanation.

"My wife is a woman of very decided views and opinions. One of them — in fact, it's really a hobby of hers — is that people of different religious beliefs cannot be happy in marriage, and ought not to marry."

"A pretty strong combination of objections, Mr. Malsby! But I think we can overcome it. For my part — "

"No; wait a minute. We must not switch off. Let me show you how this works, from Mrs. Malsby's side. Then we can take it up from ours."

"The opposing forces are drawn up in battle order," Clarke thought. He said nothing, however; only nodded to show that he was ready.

"Now," said Malsby, "while my wife and daughter are not in such close sympathy as I would wish, it is merely the natural effect of the marked differences in their natures. Mrs. Malsby is a faithful mother, you may be sure, and she has Louise's welfare constantly at heart."

He seemed to forget that he was talking to a comparative stranger, and spoke more

like a man musing for his own satisfaction than one trying to reveal a situation without reporting it in embarrassing detail.

"Louise is more like myself. She likes to do things. She likes to have people like what she does, and say so. She does what she wants to do, and generally thinks it's just about *the* right thing to do.

"Her mother does nothing without thinking about it. She is as severe with herself as she is with others. She argues everything out in her mind; and when she once reaches a conclusion, heaven nor hell can't shake it.

"Now, you see," bringing himself definitely back to the situation in hand, "you see how this applies to you and Louise. Mrs. Malsby can't realize that Louise is old enough to have a mind of her own, and can't be ordered about like a child. *I* get a lot more out of her, and influence her a lot more, by pulling with her and not against her. Sometimes I play the deep game, and go through the motions of pulling with her, when in fact I'm working the other way. But her mother often antagonizes her unnecessarily, and makes a hard job of it for herself where it ought to have been easy.

"So here's the situation, in a nutshell;

Mrs. Malsby is conscientious, but really devoted to Louise's welfare; Louise is dutiful in intent, pretty much devoted to her own welfare, and almost always at odds with her mother's idea of what her welfare requires."

"And I should imagine," said Clarke, "that each, in her own way, is blessed with considerable will power."

"Right!" said Malsby; "and, by the Lord, I'm glad to see you understand the situation so clearly, without doing any injustice to either party. It is n't every man, Mr. Clarke, who can see both sides, and give each its fair value.

"Well," he went on, "now we come to the point. I'm going to speak as plainly as I know how!

"Mrs. Malsby, as I said, believes that marriages between persons of different religions lead to unhappiness at home, and possibly to a settlement in the divorce court."

"But is it right to make religion the test at all?"

"Never mind about that! You and I may have our own ideas about it, and I guess we'd both put love so far first that the other things would n't get a look in!

But that 's the man of it. Mrs. Malsby does make this a consideration; one of the most important, too—and that 's the fact we 've got to face. No use trying to dodge facts!"

"It can't be done," said Clarke.

"That 's it! Well—Mrs. Malsby and I are Presbyterians. Louise attended that church as a child, but she has since joined the Episcopalians. She likes the ceremonial; it answers the need of her nature, you know. She is brighter than we are. Our service is too gloomy for her."

He spoke half apologetically.

"A beautiful church service for a woman whose mind and spirit are as lovely as hers," said Clarke with quiet finality.

Mr. Malsby smiled his appreciation.

"Well—I see I need n't do any more explaining! Mrs. Malsby made me promise to ask you about your religious beliefs before consenting to have you marry our daughter. You are a Unitarian, are you not? We don't know much about that religion. We 're a little afraid of it, Mr. Clarke—as people are apt to be of things they know nothing about. Now, please tell me what the Unitarian belief is. Mrs. Malsby," he concluded, with a half-

whimsical air, "she thinks it's denying the Saviour!"

A knock at the door interrupted them. Mr. Malsby answered it.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," the maid announced. "On business. He says it's very important."

Mr. Malsby turned to Clarke.

"'T was ever thus," he said, smiling through an obvious vexation. "Will you excuse me? I will come back as soon as I can get clear, and we'll have it out."

CHAPTER XI

NOT until past mid-morning were the two men able to resume their interrupted conversation. Clarke was waiting in the sanctum when Malsby returned. He laid down the book he had picked up. Malsby wore a broad grin.

"I judge the business went your way," said Clarke.

"Sure did," said Malsby, "I've just put over a deal that will bring me some glory as well as cash — but never mind that, now. It isn't half as important or interesting as what we were talking about."

"Well, then," said the Bostonian, "let's go right on. You were asking about the Unitarian belief. In the first place, sir, they have no creed."

"What! No creed? Why, I don't get you at all! How can they possibly have a church without a creed? What's the joke?"

"No joke," said Clarke; "cold fact."

He had made his statement abruptly, not without some innocent enjoyment of the shock he knew it would cause. But he

hastened to explain; it would not do to give time for a false impression to take root in the mind of his prospective father-in-law; he could see that "impressions" did not form very quickly there, but he could also see that an idea once germinated in that soil would take deep root.

"No formal creed," he explained. "It lays emphasis on certain fundamental principles, such as belief in the Fatherhood of God — the Brotherhood of Man — Salvation by Character."

"Those sound good to me," said Malsby; "but hanged if I get you on the creed idea. I 'd as soon think of corn without kernels as a church without a written creed!"

"This," said Clarke, "is the vital difference between the Unitarians' belief and that of the Trinitarian churches: that they do not subscribe to faith in the Immaculate Conception — the Trinity — the idea that Jesus Christ was the incarnate Son of God."

He had thought it best to state these facts swiftly and barely; but he saw that Mr. Malsby was really shocked.

"It may seem cruel to you, Mr. Malsby, to hew away these old terms, and the ideas they stand for. Do not think they do it

without reverence, or without appreciation of all that they have meant in the world's life! But they believe that their faith is purer, nearer the truth for which we all strive — and not one whit less beautiful, less sustaining."

Never had Clarke discussed these things when they had meant so much to him, when they had fitted so closely into the deepest desires of his own heart. He would not dodge this issue, fateful though it might easily be; and the earnestness of his purpose made him forceful beyond ordinary experience. He warmed to the subject.

"Does it," he asked, "make Jesus Christ less dear to us, less the Saviour of mankind, to regard him as a human being, like ourselves, instead of a Deity taking on himself, temporarily, the mere form of a man? A human being — but sharing with God, more than any other man who ever walked this earth, the divine attributes of holiness, purity, love? To me, this seems a very beautiful, a very helpful and strengthening belief. In adopting that belief, I am to that extent, Mr. Malsby, a Unitarian."

"You were not brought up in that church, then?"

"Oh, no; my parents were Congregationalists. The creed is about the same as yours, in the Presbyterian Church. The difference is principally—perhaps entirely—in church polity and organization."

"Why did you change?"

Clarke answered seriously:

"Because in my childhood days the Congregational Church taught the fear of God instead of the love of God. Because I wearied of what a friend of mine calls 'Churchanity.' Because I wanted no metaphysical doctrine to stand between me and the teachings of Jesus: love, faith, service."

"We stand on the same rock."

The beautiful simplicity of the words led Clarke on.

"The difficulty that confronts us today," he said, "is to form an adequate conception of God—what He is like. I was taught that He existed as a Supreme Being. One of my old college professors was fond of the phrase, 'self-conscious Ego.' They represented God as a superhuman personality, able to hear and answer prayer."

Another shock for Mr. Malsby!

"Don't you still think so?" he asked.

"Don't think me thoughtlessly revolu-

tionary! I am not an iconoclast! My ideas are constructive. I do not throw away an item of the old faith until I have found a more satisfying one to take its place."

He smiled.

"If you will not think it a trifling comparison," he continued, "I have been, in religion, like the small boy climbing a tree. I would not let go with one hand until I had a good grip with the other."

"That's sound."

"Well, sir! Since you are so sympathetic toward my ideas—though I am sure they must be somewhat surprising to you—let me answer your question as simply and directly as I can. I find it difficult—impossible—to believe in a Supreme Being seated on a throne, ruling this limitless universe—and at the same time listening to and answering supplications, wise or foolish, sent up by the children of men from this satellite revolving around a second or third rate star. I have known persons who prayed for good weather when they were going on a picnic—while a farmer, half a mile away, might be praying for rain to save his crop!

"But that is a small matter, concerning the way people pray, rather than the im-

portant fact of what prayer is and how we ought to pray.

"On the other hand, I cannot hold with the modern idea of God as a 'benevolent ether,' a spirit pervading the universe—utterly separated from any possibility of communication through prayer."

"Well, then—what is your idea of God?"

"Mr. Malsby, I say honestly that we simply cannot visualize with 'the mind's eye' the Supreme Being. Why attempt the impossible? I am not so sure that it is even desirable. If we are to worship in spirit, why should we wish to turn the spirit into something we can weigh and measure, see and feel? I do not like to give up, Mr. Malsby; I would rather fight it out than surrender. But in this matter I do not think surrender is involved at all. I do not believe such knowledge is possible to us, or would be good for us."

"You may be right—you are much nearer right than the folks who make God just a Big Man! But that 'benevolent ether' idea—is that a Unitarian belief?"

"Oh, no—not distinctively. But some of their preachers have taken it up. It's one of the modern ideas."

"Do the Unitarians not pray?"

"Oh, yes! They use prayer, but they do not use it to ask favors. They think the value of prayer lies in its reaction on the one who practices it. In other words, you feel better — you are a better man — after engaging in it, just as you are after having done any good act."

Mr. Malsby had been pursuing these inquiries not as a matter of doctrinal speculation, but with a practical motive and interest. In trying to find out what sort of a man Clarke was, he had opened up a new field.

"Well," he said, "that's a new one to me!"

It was time to get back to their personal affairs. To bring the discussion to a close, Clarke said:

"Our talk has been almost entirely negative. To get results, we must have something in the way of positive assertion. Let me try to formulate for you — and for Mrs. Malsby — my religious beliefs:

"I believe — unshakably — in a Supreme Being.

"I believe in Jesus as the founder of a religion whose doctrine is embodied in the

two parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

"I believe in immortality.

"I believe in a hell—not burning with fire and brimstone, but painful with remorse and regret. To fit my ideas of justice, it must also embody not the irrevocable sentence of a stern and vengeful God, but an opportunity for atonement and deliverance.

"I believe that sin engenders suffering, not as a punishment but as the natural fruit of its error, its violation of the universal law.

"I believe in spiritual, as well as physical evolution; that we 'grow in grace,' as the old saying was, and save our souls by development in spiritual power.

"I believe in a heaven which is the logical environment of the soul when it has attained perfection; not a material heaven, of shining mansions and golden harps, but a place where love is clouded by no shadow of selfishness. I believe, sir, that the more good we do in this world, the more we love God and love and serve our fellow men, the farther we shall be on our journey toward that bourne from whence no traveller returneth.

"And," he concluded, "I believe in *all*

churches — for each in its own way is trying to find for itself, and mark for those who come after, the way to the true goal of all life."

Clarke had never in his life talked like this. It had taken a good deal of effort. It was not easy for a man of his natural reticence and training in repression thus to unburden his soul.

He was fortunate in his auditor.

Mr. Malsby's face had reflected his feelings, as he passed through successive stages of comparative indifference — sudden awakening to keen concern — a disquieting doubt — slow conversion, and final clear conviction. He sat a moment quite motionless, then he rose to his feet, and, grasping Clarke's hand, he said:

"My boy, *you'll do!* I shall have no fear about trusting my daughter to you. Mrs. Malsby should have none — if she has, I will undertake to remove it.

"You ought to have been a minister! It would do us good to get more of your kind of doctrine, instead of the pulpit pap they feed us on.

"We've got a lot more ground to cover, but we've had a pretty long session. Sup-

pose we let the other things wait till afternoon?"

That was a welcome suggestion to Clarke. They went out for a short walk through the town.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER luncheon the conference was resumed. Dispensing with preliminaries, Mr. Malsby began:

"Louise tells me that she has given you a pretty fair idea of what she has been through here, but you are entitled to know something about her financial situation, and I—"

Clarke interrupted:

"Excuse me, Mr. Malsby—I do not want you to tell me about your daughter's finances. That has nothing to do with my errand here. I am perfectly capable of supporting her, and her children, in comfort."

"My dear Mr. Clarke, I don't doubt it. But—"

"No, wait a minute! It is my place to prove to you that this is the fact, and I am ready to do it. I inherited a modest fortune from my father, and I have added something to it. My practice has been fairly remunerative. If your daughter has any property, so much the better. It will be so

much more in reserve for her and the children, in the event of my death, or some unforeseeable disaster. But let me make it perfectly clear, Mr. Malsby, that I would marry her tomorrow, if she lost every cent she has today!"

"Right," said the elder man, cheerfully. "That's what you ought to say—I don't give you any special credit for it; I'd say the same myself if I was in your place and you in mine. And I know you mean it, just the same as I would. In fact, I guess I told Mrs. Malsby's father something pretty much like it, at that. Though," he added, "she hadn't as much as Louise, and I hadn't anything."

"We're getting off the point," said Clarke, as the other seemed to be losing himself in recollections called up by the allusion to his own courting days.

"Right, again! Well, sir—you don't quite get me. These matters have got to be considered. And in this case there's a very special reason. You remember, I spoke of Louise's financial 'situation'—not 'affairs,' as would have been more natural to say?"

Clarke nodded.

"Well, there you are! It *is* a situation,

and it has a very special bearing on your wish to marry Louise. It isn't only the question whether you shall marry her or not; it's a question of whether you are willing to enter into an engagement with a string tied to it."

Clarke apologized for the haste with which he had spoken.

"I shall be glad to hear anything you wish to tell me," he said.

"I am sure you will! And I tell you, my boy, this means something to me, too! You may be of the greatest assistance to me."

"You surprise me, sir," said Clarke.

"Yes, it's so. I am carrying something of a load. When Louise's husband died, I came on and took charge of his affairs. They were in pretty bad shape. He was in the grain elevator business—had expanded too fast, and it looked as if the whole thing might go to pieces as soon as he dropped it. But I had enough ready cash to throw in to save the day, and I closed out the business with three hundred thousand showing clear."

"Good," said Clarke. "You must have used keen judgment."

"Well, sir, I guess my judgment's about

as good as anybody's, when there's a few dollars at stake. I have been pretty successful for a fellow that started with nothing but these!"

He held out his two rugged hands.

"And *that*," Clarke supplemented, nodding. "I mean your head."

He enjoyed the unconscious pride in Mr. Malsby's manner: that uncalculated bid for a word of praise evident in his whole bearing, the same characteristic that he had remarked in the daughter and which made him admire and love her the more.

Swiftly he resolved to gratify the instinctive desire. Without apology for the directness of the query, he asked:

"How did you make your money?"

He was entirely correct in his persuasion that the question would be received as a manifestation of complimentary interest rather than as an impertinent intrusion. Malsby warmed to the subject.

"Well, sir, I made my start in corn, and as fast as I made a dollar, I put it into corn lands — the safest and most profitable investment that can be made in this country today. Better than Government bonds," he added with emphasis.

"Why, you surprise me," said Clarke. "I thought there was no investment quite so precarious as Western farm mortgages. We New Englanders have lost millions in them."

"I know you have!" Mr. Malsby chuckled. "But there are Western farms *and* Western farms. You can't make a mistake if you buy a farm right in the Corn Belt. That doesn't mean just anywhere that people are trying to raise corn! It means anywhere in a strictly limited area, where planted corn is dead sure to grow money. It's like the champagne belt in France."

"I see," said Clarke. "There's the advantage local knowledge has over remote ignorance."

"Why," said Mr. Malsby, "farms that I bought for ten or fifteen dollars an acre are worth a hundred now, and under leases are paying handsome dividends on that figure right now, Sir.

"And I'll tell you another thing. Upon the corn crop grown on these lands depends the price of hogs. And hogs, sir, are one of the corner-stones of American prosperity! Put the two together — corn, hogs — in the

way I have indicated, and, if you know the market, they spell profits!"

"Kansas and Chicago," said Clarke, "feed America."

"Well, my boy, now you can see that Louise is well provided for. She gets her share of her husband's property, and she'll get my bit of a pile some day."

"You know my feeling about these matters," said Clarke. "Why come back to them?"

"No, now—don't bristle up! I'll give it to you straight. These holdings"—he simply could not keep off the topic, it seemed—"are safe enough. The question is, what is to become of the Willoughby millions? Are the children going to get their father's share, or is this damned skunk of a Sharp going to do them out of it? And just you put this down in your notebook, *muy pronto;* it is not a fact that Louise and I have any hankering after this fortune just because it's money. Even on the youngsters' account, I'd never worry about it—except that I'd creep a mile for every cent of it, on my bare knees, before I'd let that scoundrel walk away with it. The stake isn't money alone; it's justice—see?"

"Is this fellow Sharp really so bad?" Clarke asked.

"Is he? Is he?" Mr. Malsby showed some excitement. "He sure is — and we'll find him worse, too, I guess, before we get to the bottom of it!

"Sharp has just walked right into the Willoughby Mansion and taken possession. He wears the dead man's shoes as if they'd been made for him. It would jar you to see him at the head of the family pew of a Sunday morning."

"Do the younger Willoughbys stand for it?" asked Clarke in surprise.

"They do! They've got to! Louise says she told you how he holds a club over their heads, with his knowledge of how the Works were run when the old man was alive.

"Sharp made his first successful move when he got the old man to make his will, leaving all his money to his wife, and naming him, Sharp, as executor.

"That will was a wonder. It provided that if any of the children attempted to break it, they should be disinherited by his wife. That was the only respect in which he curtailed her right to dispose of the property as she pleased."

"That was clever," said Clarke, "but not original. Men have made such wills in favor of their wives, in order to compel the good behavior of the children to their mother."

"Oh! yes — and I don't doubt that Sharp used that argument to influence Old Man Willoughby. And, you see, the old man overlooked the fact that such a provision would make it possible for the mother to deprive any one of the children of his rightful inheritance. Or, if he considered it, he may have decided that such a thing would never be thought of, and need not be provided against. What he did certainly overlook was the rottenness of that fellow Sharp!"

"Well, then," said Clarke, "am I right in supposing that Sharp has used his influence over Old Mrs. Willoughby with the idea of influencing her, later, to disinherit your daughter, and will part of the property to him? I thought when your daughter told me about it, that she was allowing Sharp more power than he possessed — "

"Not a damned bit! And all he's got, he means to use! But that's what I'm here for; I'm going to see justice done. I'm going to watch out for those children, sir!"

"And what is your plan of action?" asked Clarke, the instinct of the lawyer stirring.

"I propose to force Sharp to put his cards right out on the table — including the ace he holds up his sleeve — to find out just how much there is in the estate, then to persuade the old lady to make a will right away, let Judge Pike draw it up with all due formality, and keep possession of it. He has the confidence of everybody about here, and we'll see that no dirty work is done — that the children get what would have been their father's share. How does that strike you?"

"I don't see how you could do any better. Of course, that would not prevent the old lady from giving her property away in her lifetime, nor would it prevent her from making another will. However, a later will made in favor of Sharp and his wife, by a woman of her advanced years, would probably, under the circumstances, be easily broken, on the ground of undue influence."

"Good! Now, until that will is made, we have got to lay low, to play Br'er Rabbit. It won't do to give John Sharp or Mother Willoughby any excuse for refusing to provide for the children. Now, what would be the best pretext she could possibly have?"

"Your daughter mentioned the objection the old lady would have to her marrying again—"

"There you've got it! That's the key to the whole situation. Of course, Louise knows the old lady better than I do—and she says if it were known that she had become engaged, and was going to live in another part of the country and take the children with her, why, that would be the end of their inheritance. And I feel mighty certain she's right."

"And—" said Clarke.

"And that means that the only condition upon which you and Louise can enter upon a formal engagement now is that it shall be kept absolutely secret. I hate to have to be the one to name it to you, for it's a mighty mean condition. However, you know how I'm fixed and where I stand in all these matters.

"And, by jingo, if that condition is acceptable to you, then you not only have my full assent, but you have my assurance that I shall feel honored, highly honored, by the alliance."

Clarke decided with the speed of a lover's impatience. Why let so small an obstacle

stand in the way of his claim upon the lady being established as "official"?

He grasped Mr. Malsby's hand, thanked him for his friendliness, and assured him earnestly that his confidence would not prove to have been misplaced.

"Now," said Mr. Malsby, "I'll round up the ladies — I expect I won't have very far to look for them — and we'll report."

Mrs. Malsby, as she entered the room, gave in her appearance every indication of complete consciousness of the gravity of the situation. Mrs. Willoughby wore an air of pleased anticipation clouded with hesitancy.

Mr. Malsby assumed an air of mock gravity, and said:

"The congregation will please come to order. The Committee on Ordination begs to report that it has examined the candidate on all points touching his religious beliefs and unbeliefs, and has found him thoroughly orthodox, holding only such beliefs as become a Christian gentleman.

"Really, mother," he hastened to add, as Mrs. Malsby started to speak, "we have talked the thing out to a finish — Mr. Clarke is all right — you will approve of his religion when I tell you about it.

"And now, daughter," and there was a deep note of tenderness in his voice, "step here."

Mrs. Willoughby stepped forward.

"I give you," said her father, with an emotion he no longer tried to conceal, "I give you in betrothal to this worthy claimant for your hand."

Then he resorted again to the subterfuge of a playful manner, and said:

"And now I offer him an opportunity to show that he has no hard feelings."

Whereupon Chester Clarke gave full and abundant demonstration — for not only did he kiss his betrothed one with fervor, but he saluted her mother on each cheek, to the utter confusion of the good lady.

It was agreed that the children were not to be let into the secret, as Mrs. Willoughby was anxious to wait until they might be led to make the suggestion apparently on their own initiative. And Clarke was to be permitted to share his joy with his own family and with perhaps one or two of his closest friends. During the remainder of his stay in Topeka, he was to be the lawyer who had come from the East on business for Mr. Malsby.

As they followed her father and mother out, Mrs. Willoughby said in a low tone:

"It's all for the children, Chester, my dear one. And we shall be all the happier some day, denying ourselves for their sake!"

PART TWO

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

FROM the hour in which he had sealed the compact with Mrs. Willoughby, Chester Clarke had found himself committed to a life which involved him constantly in contradictions with his natural inclinations. He was frank, outspoken, straightforward. Subterfuge was foreign to his temperament. He had always hated deceit, scorned intrigue, and feared no scrutiny of his motives or his acts. This candor, surpassing the common measure of honesty, was the broad and solid base upon which rested securely the rising structure of his reputation at the bar. Opposing counsel had to call upon their strongest reserves when engaged in logomachy with him — but they never needed to watch him for sharp practices. What finer professional asset could a man wish than such testimony as this from his rivals and competitors?

But now he had a secret to guard. He,

who had never needed to censor his words before uttering them, must now be constantly on the watch lest a word betray him. And this was none of your natural secrets, those dark and heavy bits of knowledge whose specific gravity sinks them deep in the fluid of the mind; this was a bright and buoyant thing, seeking the surface, like a bubble born to float in the sunlight and turn each ray into a flashing spectrum. It made him happy — and happiness is lightly vocal. It made him exultant — and the natural speech of exultation is a challenging cheer. And he must hide his happiness, repress his exultation, and be silent.

He, who had never either shunned publicity or invited it, now found himself of an evening, as he looked through his *Transcript,* wondering how it would seem to be confronted by a paragraph like this: "Mr. and Mrs. Malsby of Lawrence, Kansas, have announced the engagement of their daughter, Mrs. Clara Louise Willoughby, to Chester Clarke, junior partner in the well-known law firm of —— and Clarke. Mrs. Willoughby is the widow of the late Walter Willoughby of Topeka. Mr. Clarke is a graduate of Harvard, one of the most promi-

nent members of the Boston Bar, a member of the Union and Country Clubs." He thought he would rather like it. Such a notice would put matters on their natural footing.

But this, and the satisfaction of introducing his beautiful fiancée to his friends, must be forgone: "for the children's sake" — she had said; and that meant, to him, for her sake. Whatever was asked for her sake was certain to be granted by him, ungrudgingly; not easily, perhaps, but always the more joyously the greater the sacrifice, because true love welcomes sacrifice, its best expression. Besides, the day could not be long delayed when he would be free to act according to the promptings of his nature. Meanwhile, irksome though it might be, he would make this experience a soil for the growth of satisfaction by living up to the last letter of the requirement. His reconciliation to the arrangement was made complete in the ultimate degree, by its appeal to his innate and developed chivalry: it was for *her* sake!

During the last days of his visit at Topeka he had begun to play the game, ungrudgingly, faithfully, joyfully. It had been really a game. He had been careful in the

presence of the servants to let no careless word escape, no look betray the secret. He had treated the children as any casual visitor who liked children would have been expected to; he had been formally friendly, not familiar, in his relations with Mr. and Mrs. Malsby. Hungry for kisses, he had taken one for every forty he wanted, and had taken that one as guardedly as though it had been illicit. His deportment, so far as any eye had seen it, had been that of the business man on a business errand. Louise's constant presence had helped; but now, back in Boston, without that solace, he found the game less easy. The very ignorance and unsuspectingness of his friends and associates made him restless.

But there was another side to it. His outlook on life had changed. Life seemed nobler, broader, more full of purpose. He had a greater part to play, in the practical view, an added incentive to his striving for professional success. The light of his fame would shine upon her! He felt more kindly disposed toward his fellow man. He even attempted poetry as many a one before him has when first smitten with the divine afflatus. These lines he called:

WAYMATES

Over the hills and through the heather,
All in the merry midyear weather—
Under the sky
Of dear July,
Wandering, just we two together.

You and I, in the wide world's ways,
You and I, in the golden days—
The ways of youth,
The days of truth—
Young life and love and tuneful lays!

Over the hills to the sunset strand,
Over the waves to the wonderland
Beyond the dim
And gloaming rim
Of the old gray world go, hand in hand—

Hand in hand (for the dice are thrown),
Heart of my heart, my love, my own—
Blue sky o'er us,
And before us
Luring lights of the far unknown.

Less ecstatically, he had written:

"STATE STREET, BOSTON,
"May 20, 19—.

"MY DEAR MR. MALSBY:—

"Let me thank you for the cordial manner

in which you received me at Topeka, and for the confidence you have reposed in me in giving your assent to my engagement to your daughter. I hope and trust, not only that I shall be a good husband to her, but that I may be able in some way to help make your later years — and may they be many! — your best and happiest.

"If at any time you are able to visit Boston, it will afford me the greatest pleasure to entertain you, and to have you meet some of my friends. You will like Boston still better when you know them.

"Present my compliments to Mrs. Malsby, and believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"CHESTER CLARKE."

The old man's prompt answer had delighted Clarke with its simple sincerity:

"TOPEKA, KANSAS,

"May 24, 19—.

"CHESTER CLARKE, ESQ.,

"State Street, Boston.

"MY DEAR SON-TO-BE: —

"Your letter of May 20 came duly to hand. Contents noted.

"I make no doubt you will be not only a good husband to Louise, but that you will be a good father to her children. I don't suppose I am very long for this world, and when these business matters get adjusted, you can't get married too soon to suit me.

"Thank you for your invite to visit you. I hope it may happen, and will try to bring it about.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Robert Malsby."

Then Clarke's literary labors had gone a step farther. First he had bought an engagement ring, a token of their plighted troth. What would be good enough for her? He must find one like herself: beautiful, artistic, chaste. He had run down to New York, to make the purchase away from curious eyes. He had visited the best shops, had looked over all the stock, and had returned to the place where he had seen something that had seemed just to suit — a large, perfectly shaped pearl, of lovely lustre and just a flush of pink, and flanked by two small diamonds that gave fire to the central gem. Before sending it, he had written a note to be placed in the case:

"DEAREST LOVE:—

"I wish I could be there to place this ring on your finger. You will have in it a token of my lasting devotion.

"CHESTER."

And she had written back:

"MY DEAREST BOY:—

"Oh, what a beautiful ring! When I opened the little case, it flashed out with the most delicate tints of a sunrise. I wish everyone could see it!

"And then I read your note and I thought of all this ring meant to you and me, the precious things of which it is a symbol—and the tears came, tears of joy, and I ran upstairs to my room and locked myself in. I wanted to be alone.

"Then I put the ring on my finger, and knelt down and prayed—prayed that I might be a good wife to you.

"And now I am wearing your ring as I write—a token of *our* lasting devotion.

"Your

"LOUISE."

After reading this letter the necessary and proper number of times, and before lay-

ing it away with his dearest personalia, Clarke had put it to his lips. A perfume, the perfume that clung to everything that had been in her possession, came from it.

She seemed very near to him at that moment.

CHAPTER II

THE summer went slowly through its flow, high tide and ebb. An unbroken succession of letters passed between Boston and Topeka; letters loaded with assertions of unabated affection, and graced with frequent discoveries of some new phase of the wonderful love that had entered their lives. Each letter had its report also of their daily doings.

Clarke had spent this summer, for the most part, at the North Shore, where he was within easy reach of his office, to which he was closely confined. He had made one yachting cruise with a party of friends along the Maine coast. So that these letters were bright and happy, and only the more pleasant to their reader because of the constant revelation of a gentle impatience under the necessity of continued separation. As the summer grew older, however, Clarke's longing for Louise's companionship became more impetuous.

Her letters told of the life in Topeka.

Father and mother were well; they were planning the new home in California. The doctors had advised the change of climate. The children were enjoying their long vacation; Alice often spoke of him, Clarke, but Ernest had hardly mentioned him.

Old Mrs. Willoughby, though seldom seen, was apparently in the best of health. Mr. Malsby had taken up the matter of the will with the other members of the family, who were giving him what help they could. Sharp was hanging about. He was making himself very strong in the community, taking a leading part in its public charities. He and Lucy, she had heard, were to take old Mrs. Willoughby to New York with them in the winter. While he (Sharp) had been away, on business, Mr. Malsby had had one or two interviews with old Mrs. Willoughby, to whom he had talked pretty plainly — Oh, and he had also gone over the situation with Judge Pike who had promised to do all he could.

The new house took a larger and larger part in the eastward section of the correspondence. It was to be a big place, in mission style. The architect had been given *carte blanche*, and he had devoted his in-

genuity to devising new contributions to the attractiveness of its appearance and to the comfort of its occupants.

There would be large, airy parlors, broad verandahs, hanging balconies, an open-air breakfast room, chambers with dressing room and bath *en suite;* library and music room, with a magnificent pipe organ. The furnishings were all to come from St. Louis.

Father and Mother Malsby were constantly coming to her, Louise, with questions and pleas for advice. Should there be a window *here,* or would *there* be better? Would this verandah better be placed *so*— looking toward the bay, or *so,* giving the land view? Would not a loggia be desirable here, and a sunken garden there? And as to pictures—and chairs—and hangings! "They are always asking me, and I try to be interested; but my thoughts are on the home we shall some day have—soon, I hope—you and I, in the East."

Once Clarke wrote: "I wonder that your father has ventured to put so much money into a dwelling house. It looks to me like an investment of a hundred thousand, at least."

And she wrote back: "Father says that he means this place to be the very best he can

make it—and Mother has put her heart into the scheme. It is remarkable to see how much younger it has made her, how much more interest she takes in life. You would never have expected her to be so enthusiastic over anything! It seems as though it were realizing the dream of her girlhood. Really, the two are just simply having another honeymoon, and it's perfectly lovely to see them so happy."

Mr. Malsby wrote in more practical vein. He said:

"I like it out there, and the doctors say it will keep me going years longer. Whether they're right or not, I've been out there, and I like the place. People go in for *living* there. I'm too far along to be very gay myself, but us old fellows like to see the young ones having a good time. I got a splendid big lot on the finest boulevard in the best resident section, at a great bargain. It can never lose its value, and is pretty sure to be worth more every year. Rich Americans are getting richer, and California is their playground."

It was in July that he had pleasant evidence of success, in half at least of her plan for bringing the children over to their pro-

posed marriage. He received a note, written in a childish but painstaking hand:

"DEAR MR. CLARKE:—

"My mamma has told me that you would like to marry her. She is very lonely since papa left her. Sometimes she cries. Ernest and I are as good to her as we know how to be, but it is not the same. I am sorry for her and I think it would be nice to have you as a new papa, so you had better marry her as quick as ever you can.

"Your loving
"ALICE."

He replied:

"MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND:—

"I found your small note in a pile of big letters on my desk this morning. None of them were half as nice as yours. I read it first. I 'm glad that you think I would make you a good papa. We would have good times together, would we not? I hope I shall see you soon again. I thank you for writing.

"I enclose one hug, and one big kiss—don't miss them.

"Your devoted friend,
"CHESTER CLARKE."

There were some things in the letters that brought Clarke less pleasure. Once or twice they gave him a pang of—what was it? Not jealousy; he was too strong a man for that. It was not suspicion; his Louise was far above that. But it was a very real pain. Such things as this caused it: Louise wrote about a card party to which she had gone one evening. She told how one or two gentlemen had paid her rather marked attention, and added that their wives were clearly jealous. She reported the incident without a hint of impropriety. But—it hurt! Clarke could not formulate a grievance; if he could have done so he would have refused, absolutely, to acknowledge it even to himself. His Louise could not be kept out of sight. His Louise must be admired whenever and wherever she was seen. He must school himself to submit with patience to what was, after all, the most honest of tributes to her loveliness—and so to his own good judgment.

But it was a greater trial when she wrote:

"DEAR ONE:—

"I have had such a good time! I went to Chicago on a shopping trip. I stayed two

or three days with some friends there. At dinner the first night, there was another guest, a very prominent man who is president of some railroad or other. He must be well along in the fifties, but is very gallant, and decidedly good looking. He paid a very great deal of attention to me. That night my hostess joked me about it, and said I'd be sure to have a proposal from him! Wasn't it ridiculous? I thought so, of course — but what do you think happened! The very next day there came for me a magnificent box of flowers. I don't see how it could have cost a penny less than fifty dollars — with his card, and a graceful little sentiment on it. Of course, I showed it to Mary, and we had a good laugh together. But the next day he called, and proposed — much to my astonishment."

Even this caused Clarke no severe disturbance. The instinctive recoil found no justification in his mind.

These letters did, however, increase his uneasiness in the separation. It is the simple fact that he was not jealous, nor suspicious; and he was absolutely sure in his attitude of utter faith, for Louise had not even the slightest thought of danger to their love.

There was no danger! But Clarke wanted her. He could not go on living with all those miles of good American land between them. One way or another, he must have her near him.

So he wrote that either she must come East, or he would have to go to Kansas. He could not live without her. He could endure the separation no longer! Which would she prefer?

The hours of waiting for reply dragged endlessly, but at last came her answer, and it made him happy.

"Dear Boy," she wrote, "I can understand so well how you feel — for I feel the same way. I miss you so! I think of you all day, I dream of you at night. Sometimes I want to walk right up to someone, anyone, and say: 'I love Chester Clarke — do you know it? I love the dearest, noblest man on earth and I am going to marry him!'

"Now, I have some good news for you. I am coming East! We have decided to place Ernest in a school on the Hudson, and Alice is to go to a girls' school nearby. Of course, I shall go on with them and see them properly installed — and then, dear, cannot you and I have a visit together? It has been

so hard, being deprived of the companionship that is ours by right.

"Oh, Chester, I hate this money business! But it all has to be done for the children — and I know you are as anxious as myself to save them from injustice. I dread that man Sharp! If he were a real criminal, an open lawbreaker, I should fear him less. If he were more the villain, I should know better how to deal with him. He is the more harmful, because of his seeming virtue. I believe he is not so much deliberately planning wickedness, as following his own scheming nature!

"It all comes to one thing, my dear — you and I must be together for a while. I shall reach New York, after placing the children in school, September 28. Will you meet me there?"

Chester Clarke thought it quite likely that he would; and immediately wrote her so.

September 28 — he marked the day on his calendar, so that he could cross off the days between as they passed, like a soldier cutting a notch in his gunstock for every one of the foemen he brought down. Every day that stood between him and September 28 was an enemy, to be slain without mercy!

CHAPTER III

THEY were on their way East, Louise and the two children. Clarke had wished there were some place where he could entertain them, but his father and mother were dead, and the only other relatives he had were his sister and aunt, who kept house together in the suburbs on a scale too small to be able to stand such an invasion. So there was nothing for it but to see his fiancée in New York, and to wait until she should send for him. Life seemed to have become, for him, one long wait!

At last a letter came, saying she had placed the children in school, and was at one of the Fifth Avenue hotels ready to receive him. This was an old-fashioned, superlatively respectable and notedly domestic house.

Clarke reached New York well on in the afternoon and went straight to the hotel. He took a room, then sent up his card, and went to the parlor to wait: always wait—but now it would be only a matter of minutes, instead of days and weeks!

Soon she came, looking lovelier than ever.

After a moment, in which they exchanged greetings, Clarke said:

"Dear, if we stay here another minute, there will be a 'scene'! I cannot wait, proprieties or no!"

"Let's go up to my room," she said. "I, too, hate this formality."

As they went up in the elevator, she said:

"I have always stopped here on my visits to New York, the house is so quiet and comfortable — so homey. They have always been kind and obliging at the office and it is convenient to have a place where you are so well known that you can get a check cashed at any time."

Once in the room, with the door closed behind them and all the curious eyes of the world shut out, Clarke held out his arms, and she let herself be gathered close in them. Sweeter were the kisses, for the long time without them.

Then Clarke seated himself in a big easy chair, and again folded his beloved one in his arms. And there they sat, scarcely speaking, while the clock on the mantel ticked off the full minutes. They were living in an eternity — one of love's eternities

—bound up in a few moments of the time which we measure off so grudgingly when under the tyranny of smaller matters. It was enough for each of them just to be in the presence of the other. All the great lovers of the world—and most of the little ones, made greater by love—have known these all-encompassing moments.

The clock struck the half hour, then the hour. The circle of the little eternity had been explored. They parted for the time needed to dress for dinner.

Then there followed the happiest of meals. They went to the theatre. Clarke escorted Louise to her room, they said good-night in lovers' fashion, and Clarke returned to his own quarters.

A sharp rap followed almost immediately. Wondering who could wish to see him at that time and place, he opened the door.

An attaché of the hotel stood in the corridor.

"You have just come from a lady's room," he said, curtly.

Clarke was too surprised and indignant to shape his words.

"Why—what do you mean?" he asked: not very brilliantly or effectively, as he had

to admit to himself afterward. But he was taken clean off his feet, bowled over.

"I mean just that — that you have just left the room of a lady who is our guest."

"Well!" said Clarke, "is that any concern of yours?"

In the utter consciousness of virtue, it was impossible to adjust himself so swiftly to this unexpected challenge. The man was insolent; but he represented the law-and-order of the place. Whether his challenge was proper or not, it had behind it an unassailable authority.

"It is. No man is allowed to enter a woman's room in this hotel. It is against the rules of the house. Unless you might be the lady's husband," he added. He was evidently just a little fearful, after all.

Clarke took advantage of the man's uncertainty.

"Well! you do not know that I am *not* the lady's husband," he said, and closed the door.

He stood for a moment aghast. The thing was outrageous! He could not get it straight in his mind; what a world! He, a gentleman, to be told by this whipper-snapper in uniform that he should not see

his betrothed, his One Woman, in private! And yet, if that was the rule of the house — the house, mindful of its own interests, and compelled to take people as they came, had a right to make its rules — had to make rules in self-defence. Damn such rules! not as rules, perhaps, for his lawyer mind had to analyze, but as rules dictating *his* course of conduct. But — there they were, the Rules of the House, and with the power of enforcement behind them. Right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, there they were — and he was subject to them; they could not be ignored, certainly not defied. To say more would be to court disaster. Already, though in perfect innocence, he had compromised the woman he loved, the woman who was to be his wife; had compromised her, at least, in the eyes of this contemptible but powerful flunkey, who probably had received his orders from the office, and would almost certainly report there. At any moment he might expect a request for both of them to leave the hotel. In rough words — they would be turned out. No man had ever dared to speak to Chester Clarke like that. This lackey could do it; and there was no resisting the power he rep-

resented. It was decidedly an awkward situation for Chester Clarke.

Indignation — apprehension — mortification and humiliation: these were his emotions. They summed almost into fear.

He had not had a thought of anyone watching him. He had thought of himself and Louise being joyously isolated in the crowd. That seemed to have been a misconception. The question now was: What to do?

Louise could have no suspicion of what was going on. She had been as unconcerned in receiving him in her room as she would have been had he called at her own home. It would distress her beyond measure to know that such a thing had happened. And how could she possibly help holding him in some degree responsible? Even if she did not openly blame him, she must inevitably associate him painfully with the humiliating experience. It would rob their reunion of its heavenly joy, it would darken their now roseate future!

At last Clarke arrived at the one clear solution, the one possible conclusion. They must leave the place and find other accommodations; and she must not know anything

about this distressing incident. He must effect the change without arousing her suspicion.

With this resolution in mind — and still nursing his indignation — he retired.

As they sat at breakfast the next morning, chatting happily, Clarke managed to remark with satisfactorily casual manner:

"This hotel is pretty much given over to transients. It isn't just the place for us. You should have an apartment — just such a place as I got for you in Boston."

"Oh, that would be lovely!" she said. "We should have so much more freedom."

Clarke shivered.

"And," he added, "there is another reason. In such a place there would be fewer people coming and going, and less likelihood of someone appearing who might be too much interested in our affairs."

Louise accepted the suggestion with real pleasure and no suspicion of special reasons, and that day he engaged for her an apartment on the west side of Central Park, while he found rooms conveniently near.

Here they were as comfortable as could be wished. Clarke came and went as he pleased, and now and then they had a cosy

luncheon in her parlor. They made love—they talked about the children—they had pleasant rambles in the Park, and went to various entertainments.

But Louise seemed always to turn from any subject back to the Willoughby fortune and the scheming Sharp. He could not divert her thoughts from it. He told her she was making too much of it, he begged her to let the affair take its own course; but it could not be banished, it seemed almost an obsession with her. It was "all for the children," and he tried to be patient, but at times he wearied of it, and wished there had been no Willoughby fortune.

Then he would, long before this, have made her Mrs. Clarke and installed her as mistress of Chester Clarke's home!

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Clarke went back to Boston, a day or two later, leaving Mrs. Willoughby settled in this apartment, she told him not to worry about her, she had shopping to do and the time would pass pleasantly and swiftly.

"I shall enjoy the hours, dear," she said playfully, "as they pass, for each one that goes by will be bringing our next meeting nearer!"

He smiled.

"Supposing that you let me keep your watch till you come next time," she added. "It will answer a twofold purpose, to mark the time, for mine is not running, and as a security, a hostage, shall I say, of your early return. You are always where you can see a clock; I shall not be."

"Do you really mean it or are you joking?"

"I really mean it. It would be very useful to me when I am here in the apartment,

and particularly at night, to know the time. You shall have it back when you return."

"You are to have this watch," he said, "because it will be of service to you. If I were to furnish an adequate pledge of my return, it would be all that I possess, my life itself."

When he did return, she handed back his watch with the remark that hers was running now.

The first time he opened it he looked into the eyes of his beloved, for there photographed on the case was the most beautiful picture that he had ever seen of her.

The next three week-ends Clarke spent in flying trips to New York; and on the third visit, Louise announced her readiness to reveal the Great Surprise. During the intervening time she had mystified him continually. He was such a stupid guesser. He guessed slowly, but guessed many things, for she kept him at it relentlessly, seeming never to tire of the sport. The more he guessed, the further he got from the truth, she told him, laughing; and when he tried to guess his way back, she said he was going in circles.

Had Clarke and his Louise possessed a

love less simple, they would have had less of love itself. Loving as they did, they loved to play; were fortunate in having so much time for it, and might have been unfortunate if they had had more, since love grows by fasting as well as by feeding.

Thus it was that Louise's little secret gave them both so much pleasure. If she had said, "My shopping, dear, is so much fun; I am buying my trousseau," he would have rejoiced with her. But he would have been *trying* to rejoice with her! So she had used all her woman's wiles to prepare him for a spontaneous participation in her joy.

Not even when she took him into the fashionable dressmaking establishment where she had kept many appointments through all the delightfully hard-working period of successive fittings, did he, dense mind of masculinity! perceive upon what throbbing secret's threshold it was his privilege to stand. She was tense with eagerness, and his anticipation ran no farther than "a new gown"—just that, a new gown—when she was all athrill to have him see her go through that last rite, the final fitting of her wedding-gown! Who but a woman can know the delights of that moment in a

woman's life? None so nearly as a lover; and if Clarke was very much the lover as he waited, in the room bright with many mirrors, he was more the lover — he was the lover enraptured — when at last, a queenly figure in shimmering silk of softest gray, she swept into the room, tremulously eager for praise, blushing like a daughter of the dawn.

Clarke gasped. His Louise was lovely, but she was only woman. This was the goddess — the queen of goddesses. Sweet hyperbole, not to be bruised with blows of Apology! Clarke arose and stood feasting his eyes. Never had she seemed quite so lovely. The modiste had depended for her effect upon the rich softness of the material and the perfection of fit, rather than upon the lesser art of trimming.

Louise stood turning slowly round, her figure reflected in the mirrors, magically multiplying unique perfection, and looking at the images with an expression of such innocent self-consciousness as may be seen in children at their best.

"How do you like me now?" she asked at length.

"I have n't words to begin the tale," said

Clarke. "It is wonderful! No human being *could* look so lovely. It cannot be!"

"But it *is!*" she laughed, "and when I put this on I shall be your wife."

With sudden transformation she ceased to blaze, and quietly shone. Then, with another of her swift transitions, she assumed the air of a "practical" person.

"You see, dear," she said, "I shall be married in this dress — but I have had it made so that it will do also for a travelling dress. It is to be sent to my apartment today."

Madame, the chief, who stood by, had been examining the gown critically, to see that her assistants had left no flaw in the lovely structure. When she perceived that the gentleman was Mrs. Willoughby's fiancé, she was in her turn enraptured.

"Oh, la-la!" she cried, "so this is Mr. Clarke. I am what you call done pr-r-roud! And the gown — is it not lovely? *Ah, elle est vraiment magnifique!* Such a pleasure to fit such a figure!"

She passed her hands reverently, lovingly, over the soft, clinging material. Her sensitive nature thrilled with the joy of the artist displaying his art. "*Très chic!*" she ex-

claimed, quite unconscious of audience. "*Elle va comme un gant.—Et l'étoffe—c'est superb,—elle a enormement de cachet.*"

She pronounced her judgments, one by one. Then, turning to Clarke, she said:

"*C'est un véritable plaisir d'habiller Madame.*"

He assured her, in such terms as his restricted masculine vocabulary afforded, of his appreciation; and he went on to express as adequately as he could the emotions aroused in him by the further loveliness which the delighted assistants, Lucille and Babette, brought forth for his inspection; two evening gowns, wonderful creations still in intermediate stages of evolution—and several others, which left him an impression that he could express no more definitely than as a mass of filmy, lacy things whose purchase must have effected the transfer of a small fortune.

As they went back to the apartment, Louise explained that she had been making all these preparations so that there should be no delay caused by the necessities of her toilette after the obstacles in the way of their marriage should have been removed.

And now the floodgates seemed to have

been opened, and from all the shops came pouring streams that bore a treasure on every wave. Millinery, lingerie, shoes, gloves, came in packages of so many sizes and shapes that Clarke could not for the life of him see how they were ever to be crowded into the little apartment, and felt that the skill of all the geometers in history could hardly devise a way to fit together their polygonal intricacies. But one woman has more wits than a hundred mathematicians, and Louise solved the problem not only with ease but with a delight which — to Clarke, at least — proved positively that this was not mere instinct but sheer ingenuity. The cubic contents of these packages, he was sure, would aggregate not an inch less than seven times that of the rooms; and where then was your Father of all the Geometers, with his axiom about the contained and its container? Axiom, quotha!

This is all a part, and an important part, of the history of Chester Clarke. They who cannot read between the lines of this portion of our chronicle are not meant to be students of history. They will not appreciate the insignificant item that follows:

The next evening, Sunday, just before

it was time for Clarke to leave for the midnight train to Boston, Louise, now relaxed and calm after the excitements of Saturday, showed him a pearl gray tie and gloves which she had bought for him; they matched the wonderful gown. And then, with a wealth of tender words, she opened before him a case holding a very beautiful scarfpin.

"That," she said, "is to be the gift of the bride."

What wonderful quality is it in the light of love that makes it cast no shadow?

CHAPTER V

EXTRAORDINARY pressure of business made it impossible for Clarke to get back to New York as soon as he would have liked. He had been compelled to miss a Sunday, and two weeks can be very much more than twice as long as one week! Again the letters flew back and forth. One of them tested again the understanding to which he thought he had trained himself after Louise had reported the incident, in Chicago, of the railroad president who had followed his box of flowers with an offer of marriage.

On one of his earlier visits to the apartment, he had chanced to meet an old friend of his, an army officer, veteran of many campaigns, but coming out of his sixties remarkably hale and hearty. Clarke had taken him to the apartment to tea, and he had been pleased by the old soldier's open admiration of his hostess. Louise had presided charmingly at the tea table, and had been most gracious to the visitor.

On the Sunday of Clarke's absence, she had had the General to dine with her, and on Tuesday she had let him take her to the theatre.

"It was so dull without you," she said; "and besides, it was a real pleasure to be able to entertain an old friend of yours. But I was rather surprised when he held my hand during the performance, and also when he kissed me goodbye at my door, though several of the people in the house happened to be passing at the moment. I suppose it was just his fatherly way of setting the stamp of his approval on me."

Clarke did not indorse such approval, but he refused to let his mind dwell on it.

Then on Friday, came a letter announcing that she had found the apartment too dull, and had moved to a hotel; "a thoroughly high-class place, where I shall see more people and life will be a little less dreary."

So Clarke decided that his most important business for the next few days lay in New York. He called at the hotel early Saturday afternoon, and they had a long talk. Without excitement, or resentment, she told him that the true cause of her latest move had been an uneasiness resulting from a remark

overheard between two of the servants. "Never mind what it was," she said; "it did not amount to anything, and I suppose they are talking that way all the time. What really bothered me more than the words, the only thing that made me pay any attention at all, was their evident embarrassment when they realized that I had heard. In fact, dear, I only half heard. But the incident, small as it was, annoyed me just enough to make me restless. Isn't it odd, that among all these crowds, two people should become the subjects of servants' gossip?"

"It is irritating," said Clarke. "It is as though, just as soon as two people wanted to be alone, somebody conspired deliberately to make life miserable for them."

Sunday they took a trip to the Jersey Shore. Clarke made the best of the rather severely limited opportunities afforded by the outing for those demonstrations of affection he craved as naturally as a hungry man craves food. Returning, he left her at the elevator, and went to another hotel for the night. He was walking, now, as circumspectly as a man could walk.

But the winds of trouble had not ceased

to blow. Where there had been no more than a breeze, the gale now leaped to life.

Monday morning Clarke spent downtown, on business.

In the middle part of the afternoon, through with business for that day, he went to the hotel, and sent up his card. The messenger brought back a sealed note.

"No answer," said Clarke, shortly, and the boy walked away.

Clarke, off in a corner of the big room, tore open the note and read it hastily.

"Dear one," she said, "I cannot come down to see you. Something has happened. Oh, please, come to me!—L. W."

Flinging to the winds his good resolutions, heeding nothing except that she had summoned him, Clarke went up to her rooms.

She was standing in the middle of the floor, evidently much agitated. She was paler than he had ever seen her.

"My dear girl!" he cried, "what has happened?"

She seemed to gain immediate assurance from his presence. She grew calmer in manner, and her voice sounded quite natural as she said:

"Don't be frightened, Chester! Nothing

has happened to me—" But the agitation shown in her note had been too genuine to disappear so suddenly and it was revealed in her voice. There was a suggestion of tears.

"Louise," he said, and he took her in his arms. "Tell me, what has frightened you?"

"It isn't that I am frightened—it is rather that I am worried—anxious. This is what happened. It may be much, it may be little—but it startled me.

"I went out for some violets at the flower store on the corner, and when I came back, just as I stood waiting for the elevator, I caught sight, in the lobby, of that man!"

"What man?"

"John Sharp!"

Clarke was surprised.

"Are you sure?"

"Why, how could I possibly be mistaken? I saw him as plain as I see you now."

"But there must be, in this big town, a dozen men who look like Sharp—enough so, at least, to be mistaken for him in a passing glimpse like that."

"But I tell you, I was not mistaken! I know John Sharp too well to be mistaken. I felt him as well as saw him—I could feel his presence if he stood at the other side of

a great crowd from me. And, if it had been someone else he would not have leered. I saw him leer. He was looking straight my way."

The cumulative argument could not be overborne.

"Well, then," said Clarke, "taking the worst possible view of it, John Sharp is in New York—he was in this hotel today—and he saw you. Now, supposing all that to be true, what harm is there in it?"

"Oh, Chester, I cannot say what—but there is harm in everything that man does. There is harm in his ascertaining anything that might make him suspect that we are engaged.—Oh, he may be stopping in this very house! I must move—we must move at once. I have been packing, ever since, and am ready to go this minute, dear."

Clarke had never seen her so disturbed. He tried to soothe her.

"I will go down to the office, at once, and see if Sharp is registered here," he volunteered.

"No," she exclaimed, "Oh, no! It would do no good. If he has been here once, he is likely to come again whether he is a regular guest here or not. I should be afraid of

running into him every time I left my rooms."

Clarke saw the force of this. He himself would prefer not to have an encounter with John Sharp. He was silent, thinking.

Louise was the first to speak.

"There is nothing else to do," she said. "We must get out of this place, and at once. You will go somewhere else, for my sake, won't you, dear—and for the children's sake!"

She spoke the last words, not pleadingly, but with an air of finality, as though she knew he could not resist after that.

And he could not. He was more worried than he would have been willing to have her know. The position in which they were placed had been brought about by conditions which he not only had not sought, but which he had accepted against the force of his own positive convictions. As he had accepted the secret engagement, so too had he accepted, without reservation or qualification, the necessity of these clandestine meetings. It was all of a piece.

She had never appeared conscious that their relations, pure and honorable as they were, could be criticized or misjudged or

misunderstood. "A woman of so much experience?" the world might say, and shrug. But he knew! It was only Sharp's appearance that had excited her. She had gone instantly to the core of the situation. If Sharp should learn of her engagement, he would take it straight to the old lady, and she would never let a penny pass to her grandchildren, owning a new father in place of her idolized son. The children did not need the money. Mr. Malsby would leave his lesser but still substantial fortune to Louise, and he, Clarke, could himself make them comfortable. But they must not suffer injustice at the hands of this scheming fellow, Sharp.

As to his own relations with Louise, he knew that her honor could not be safer anywhere than with him; but what a twisting thrust of life's irony-tipped spearhead, that he, in whose safe-keeping she was best off, should be made by a cruel world the very instrument of possible misfortune to her!

From his own selfishly personal point of view, this constant running away, this dodging, this duplicity, was abhorrent.

It took only a moment to marshal these considerations in his mind.

"Where shall we go?" he said. "If you hadn't pleaded the children's interest, I should much prefer to stay right here. Probably we have seen the last of Sharp; but if not, we can stand a showdown with him. We have nothing to fear. If he ever said a derogatory word about you, I'd thrash him."

"I know. But all other considerations vanish before the children's interest. For their sake, you will do what I ask!"

"Very well! You know that with me that means for your sake. But where — where — where? Do you happen to know," he asked, turning half whimsical, "of any retreat where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest? If you do, I'll wager it is not in New York!"

"Oh, but it is!" she cried; "it really is!"

She had been thinking hard, and had apparently viewed her way clear at last through the difficulty.

"At least," she amended, "there is a pretty good chance of our finding it here. Please, dear, hand me the telephone book!"

Radiant with hopefulness, she sought out the number of their paradise.

CHAPTER VI

LOUISE turned the pages of the telephone book a moment, then, with a little cry of pleasure, she looked up.

"I have found it!" she said. "'Hans Giese, Violins.' How it does bring back old times to see that name once more!"

"But who is this Hans?"

"Why, of course—you never heard of the old darling, did you? It seems as if we must always have known the same people, does n't it, dear?"

"Yes—until someone like this crops up. Hans was—?"

"He was a dealer in violins. He sold me one when I was studying in New York. I had a fine friendship with old Hans and his wife. I used often to visit with them. He was a Belgian. He played beautifully—had a wonderful method of bowing—he gave me some excellent points. They were devoted to me. That was quite a few years ago. I wonder if they are both still living. Let 's call them up."

She took the phone, and Clarke stood with his head resting lightly against hers in order to hear the whole conversation.

A woman's voice came over the wire; an old and feeble voice.

"Who is it?" asked Louise.

"I am Mrs. Giese."

"Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Giese! Do you know me, do you recognize my voice? I am Louise Malsby. Do you remember me?"

"Why, my dear child! Of course I remember you. Where are you? How kind of you to think of me, such an old woman as I am now."

"I am not Miss Malsby any more, Mrs. Giese, I am Mrs. Willoughby now."

"Well, well! How everything does change."

"And how is Mr. Giese?"

"Oh, he is dead. He died five or six years ago, but I still keep the name board by the door. People who have been away from town often come in, and ask to see Hans."

"Then you are all alone?"

"Yes, all alone—with the old fiddles. There is not another soul here in this apartment. It is just as it was when you were

here, just as it was when he died. I've always kept everything just the same."

"Well, Mrs. Giese, I wanted to ask a favor. I wanted to ask if you could take me in for—oh, perhaps a few days—and a friend who is here with me, a gentleman. I have a special reason for asking it."

Mrs. Giese was silent a moment.

"Well," she said, "I haven't any help, there isn't anyone to do for you; there is almost nothing to eat—the beds, they haven't been made for years. It is all the same—just the same as it was when he died. I wanted to keep everything just as my Hans left it."

"Oh, my dear old friend! If you're willing to take us in, all that won't make a bit of difference to us!"

"When would you want to come?"

"Right away, Mrs. Giese. We would be there in half an hour or so."

A moment's silence, then the old lady said:

"Well, I suppose *he* would! He was very fond of you. And you can see his things just as they are. I never changed anything, they are all just as they were when he died—just the same."

She spoke in a monotone, as though the

words might have been running in her mind through the years, ever since she had first taken the well-kept resolve to have "the things" remain "just as they were, just the same."

"All right, then," said Louise; "we'll be with you in a little while," and she hung up the receiver.

"Now for a four-wheeler," said Clarke, "and let's get out of here."

"But, dear! we can't carry all this luggage in one cab!"

"Well, then," said Clarke, "two! Anything, to get moving."

And two cabs it was.

"The retreat from Moscow," he said; "only, Napoleon didn't bother with luggage, while we have impedimenta enough for an army."

She smiled brightly up into his face, and placed a hand affectionately on his arm. Her anxiety seemed to have vanished the moment they left the hotel. She seemed as happy as a child on a holiday.

They drew up in front of what, from its looks, must have been one of the oldest of Gotham's cave dwellings.

"This must be the original apartment

house of them all," Clarke remarked, good-naturedly.

"It was here before people spoke of apartment houses, dear," she said. "It's what they call in New York a flat house."

On a small board beside the window in the first floor, over the basement, were the remains of some lettering that once had shone resplendent in fresh gilt paint. From the parts of the letters that remained, Clarke could decipher the inscription:

HANS GIESE
Violins
Bought, Sold, and
Repaired

"How familiar it all looks," said Louise. "Only a little more decayed, a little dingier. I used to come here quite often. They were such quaint, nice people. They fascinated me, and they liked me. It was a pleasure to give them pleasure, they appreciated every little kindness so thoroughly."

Mrs. Giese opened the door and ushered them in. She was all aquiver; partly, Clarke guessed, from embarrassment but more with excitement at seeing once again her "dear

Miss Louise," of whom she was evidently fond, with a fluttery, grandmotherly sort of affection. "Fluttery" seemed the right word, for the little old lady was birdlike in the way she held her head and the way her eyes were cocked at one when she spoke. Sometimes, too, she twittered; rather more like a shrill voiced sparrow than a songbird, but never with bad humor. There was something pathetic in the appearance of her shrivelled old face. She had been living alone since Hans died, living in memory of him. A grotesque fancy struck Clarke that she was Giese's monument; a monument animated just enough to attend to the one duty of "keeping the things the same — just the same."

"Come in, Mrs. Willoughby," she said. "Come right in, Mr. Willoughby."

This might have been embarrassing; but the lovers did not permit it.

"This is Mr. Clarke, Mrs. Giese," said Louise.

"Dear me — I do beg your pardon. But I thought you said your name was Mrs. Willoughby, Miss Malsby."

"Yes, it is. My husband, too, died; and this is Mr. Clarke."

The old lady's mind was not alert enough to grapple with problems; she simply accepted facts. Whatever her dear Miss Malsby, or Mrs. Willoughby, told her, was surely a fact, so this gentleman must be Mr. Clarke. It was a little strange, but she did not stop to puzzle it out. Mrs. Willoughby's Mr. Clarke was not to be challenged by her. So, while Clarke carried in the luggage — the driver, in consideration of a generous tip, helping with the heavier pieces — she stood chatting with Louise. When all the boxes and bundles had been brought in, she showed her guests the rooms. And what rooms!

The apartment, or "flat," cut straight through the house from front to rear. Only the parlor at the front and the kitchen and dining room at the back had outside windows. The bedrooms were hall rooms, dark and dismal.

The front room was large, and had been turned into a veritable curio shop. Here were relics of foreign antiquity; cabinets, images, pictures, statuettes, books, all in promiscuous disorder. In every corner two or three violins were stacked. There was the musty smell of old leather, and the less

pleasant odor of dank walls in an unaired room. If the spirit of Hans Giese dwelt here, Clarke thought, among the possessions he had prized, it must be a gloomy spirit. Yet in the dim light that filtered through the shaded windows, with something like the softness of the subdued illumination of a cathedral nave, the old objects of virtu took on a certain air of dignity, rather enhanced than diminished by their jackets of dust.

"Now," said Mrs. Giese, "the next room is mine, and the next two shall be yours."

"Come, Chester," said Louise, "let's move in! I'll take the room next to Mrs. Giese's and you shall have the other."

"And as soon as we're settled," said Clarke, "I mean to take you both out to dinner."

"She looks as though she might not have had a good square meal since Hans died," he said to Louise, when they were alone for a moment.

"The poor old dear!" Louise's eyes were bright as though a swiftly passing tear had filmed them.

"I suppose she's been too busy keeping things 'just the same' to think about eating. Did you notice the marks in the dust

on the telephone? I don't suppose she has two calls a year."

So they took the old lady out to dinner, and it was good to see her respond to the stimulus of changed surroundings. To Clarke it had seemed almost incredible that a human being could settle down to so mechanical a routine of existence. It reassured him pleasantly, to see her perk up, once they got her into the brilliant dining room. But she soon tired of the lights and the confused sounds, and while she thanked them rather prettily for their kindness, it was plain enough that she was glad to be home again —keeping things just the same.

The two women made up the beds. Mrs. Giese retired, and Louise came into the parlor, where Clarke had made himself as comfortable as he could, and was enjoying a cigar.

He had been thinking, and as soon as Louise came in, he said:

"My dear girl, this is impossible—simply impossible! We cannot stay in such an old rat hole as this. Why, there aren't even the necessaries, to say nothing of the comforts of life. This mouldy old place isn't fit to live in—the old fashioned closed plumbing

is a positive menace to health: why, I can almost see malaria germs crawling on the walls, and if you listen, you 'll hear the footfalls of Old Man Roomatiz. Seriously, dear, this is n't right — it won't do at all."

"I think it 's funny," said Louise. "I don't think I could stand it long, myself, but for a while, it 's larks. And there 's one good thing about it, you must admit, that makes up for a lot of the discomforts — John Sharp won't come here!"

That allusion opened the way out for the thoughts that had been accumulating, and Clarke let them come.

"My dear girl," he said, "our situation is simply impossible. I am shunning my friends, and living in dread of exposing you to criticism. I cannot bear to think of having you compromised, as they call it; and I could not live — I could only exist, with no reason for even existing, away from you. It is my place to protect you, dear — not to endanger your reputation!"

He rose, and paced the floor.

"Now, Louise," he went on, "let 's have it out, once for all! We have begun with a secret engagement — why not go just one little step further, and make it a secret

marriage? I don't like secret marriages much more than I do secret engagements — but it will at least make us more comfortable. We can announce it just as soon as the will is signed. It is only changing the date, anticipating what we are already committed to. It will put me in my proper place as your protector, and it will not affect the interests of the children."

He stopped pacing, turned squarely toward her, and said, with an air of determination that halted just short of desperation:

"Louise, will you marry me now, and put an end to all this needless anxiety?"

Smiling softly, she too stood up, and moving over to where he stood waiting, she placed a hand on each of his square shoulders and said, with the sweet serenity of a June day:

"My dear, I did not dream you were so seriously concerned about this. You never said a word, never gave a sign of it. I could not let you be unhappy, if it were in my power to make you happy — I love you too much for that! Of course I 'll agree to the secret marriage. I 'm wholly in favor of it, I think it would be the happiest sort of a

solution. And," she finished, rippling with smiles, "I am so anxious to wear that beautiful wedding gown!"

"You dear girl," Clarke cried; and they sealed the bargain with a kiss, in the only fashion fit for such a contract.

CHAPTER VII

CLARKE had urged his argument with all the earnestness of a man battling for his life. He had supposed it necessary to batter down the walls of a resisting will; at least, in gentler terms, it had seemed a matter of course that he would have to answer, one by one, all the arguments contrary to his that a woman's wit could muster. He had been ready for a long, and possibly even painful debate. But he had thought the thing out, he had arrived at the one conclusion that seemed to him inevitable; and he meant to have his way, for he knew it to be the best way, for her as well as for himself.

And then, she had calmly ignored his carefully thought out and well presented arguments; had gone straight to the core of the matter, and, without a moment's hesitation over details, had settled the whole thing in a word. And how sweet a word!

Her quick, favorable and affectionate response had cleared the clouds away. It might have made him, the powerful pleader,

feel rather foolish, like a general of artillery who has been pounding at a dummy battery, had not joy over the successful issue of his attempt wiped out all lesser emotions.

And her reply had given him another revelation of her character. It was a jewel of many facets. In none of them had he ever detected a flaw. She was consistently inconsistent, but in every phase delightful. The emotion of the moment was her supreme guide; but fortunately her education, her experience, with the firm depths of her character to base them, gave her a constancy not the less charming because of the changing surfaces she showed.

Specifically, Clarke thought that her acceptance of his proposal evidenced a breadth of understanding and a depth of feeling which would lead her always to brush aside or ignore technicalities. The whole thing stood foursquare and immovable upon the broad and solid foundation of their mutual confidence and love.

The reaction in him had been instantaneous. His misgivings had disappeared. The promptings of his heart had supplanted the promptings of his mind. He was a very happy man. And he had told her, drawing

her to him, "you are the dearest and best of women. You are the most wonderful thing that ever happened."

Then she had asked for his plan in detail, and he had been ready with his answer:

He would wire to his office in Boston, saying that he would not be home for a week or ten days. They would convert the Old Curiosity Shop into a chapel, and there they would exchange their vows, and go forth man and wife. They would have their wedding breakfast, and then the honeymoon.

"Does my plan meet with your approval?" he had asked.

"Perfectly," she had answered; and then, "of what will our wedding ceremony consist?" she had asked. "Does it call for a rehearsal?"

"No," he had answered. "I will tell you what to say when the time comes, if you need any more prompting than your own heart gives. I am to take you as my wedded wife, and you are to take me as your wedded husband, for better or for worse till death do us part; and I am to give you a ring as a token of our union. We shall be married in the sight of God and man as surely as if we

met at the altar and had a priest perform his office, and then marched down the broad aisle to Mendelssohn's music. The audience, no doubt, will shower us with congratulations, roses and rice."

"The audience?"

"Mrs. Giese!"

"The poor old thing, what will she think?"

"Think! Why, she will be greatly flattered to think that she has been the guest of honor at so brilliant a function. The only question is, Can she be depended upon to keep the secret for a few weeks?"

"I am sure of it, dear. And then—"

"And then we shall have the public ceremony. Do you suppose I would plan to rob you of that one greatest hour in a woman's life? No, dear—I could not be so heartless!"

"Father is looking forward to that, too. And you need not worry about Mrs. Giese's keeping the secret. She is devoted to me. You saw how she clung to me tonight. I think she would give up her soul for my sake if I asked her to. Besides, what opportunity has she to tell anyone? The poor dear doesn't see anyone, from year's end to

year's end, but the tradespeople who supply her little wants."

Their plans all made for the morrow—the momentous morrow—they had parted.

And so now, as Chester Clarke awoke, his first thought was that the Holy Day had come. He stood upon the highest peak of his life. This day his eager soul was to claim its mate. Among the numberless atoms of humanity, these two had been brought together to answer some new purpose in the universal scheme. Joy and responsibility ripened together. The boughs of his tree of happiness hung heavy with fruit, ripe for the plucking. He was happy, ineffably happy; and he rejoiced in the sense of solemnity that seemed hovering about him, for the ceremony would be truly a sacrament in the sight of God.

Before the others were astir, he visited a neighboring florist's and returned with a great box of flowers. There were red roses to stand in the vases, and cream white buds to be carried by the bride.

After a light breakfast, he hurried down town, bought railroad tickets, wired for rooms at an inn in the Catskills where he had planned their sojourn, and bought the

wedding ring, a circle of gold studded with diamonds.

Hurrying back to the apartment, he found that Louise had, with deft touches, transformed the musty old front room into the satisfying semblance of a chapel. Mrs. Giese had given proof of her affection by permitting the more obtrusive pieces of furniture to be temporarily moved out. With the help of certain draperies cleverly placed, the upright piano at one end of the room had become an altar. Two candles burned upon it. In front of it Louise had set a small stand, supporting a Bible. The flowers had been placed with fine artistic skill. All was ready, and Louise had gone to her room to dress. The hour drew near.

To Clarke, as he changed his clothes, the putting on of the tie, pin and gloves that she had given him was in itself a ceremony.

As the old clock in the hall struck twelve, Louise came from her room, looking lovely beyond words in the gray gown, and a hat also of gray.

With her came Mrs. Giese, wearing a marvellous dress made in the fashion of a bygone generation — a wine colored silk, with a broad collar of old lace, rich and rare

enough to be esteemed a prize by any lady in the land. She was all in a flutter with excitement, but too deeply impressed with the importance of the occasion to relax one iota the rigid self-control to which she had committed herself.

And so, the final step was to be taken. The room was very quiet. In the dim light, unmarked presences seemed hovering near, as Clarke, taking Louise by the hand, escorted her to the altar, where they faced about and stood side by side.

Placing one hand on the Bible, he said, in clear, vibrant tones:

"Louise, I take you to be my wedded wife, to love, cherish and protect. And, in token of our union, I give you this ring," and he slipped the ring upon her finger.

Then she in turn, placing her hand upon the Bible as he had done, said, with accents wonderfully low but sweet and clear as a note from one of old Hans's beloved instruments:

"Chester, I take you to be my husband, to love and to serve. And I accept your ring in token of our union."

Then she whispered: "May I repeat the Lord's Prayer?" and so, standing hand

in hand, they repeated the noble words together.

Clarke, placing his two hands on either side of her head, kissed her on the forehead; and it was over.

Mrs. Giese smothered them with her congratulations, and with much joy and laughter they entered the waiting carriage, and were borne away to the jolliest little wedding breakfast that ever was.

Afterward, as they stood waiting for the carriage in which they were to ride to the station, they appeared so well set up, so well groomed, so prosperous and happy, that not a few of the passersby turned for a second glance; and one was overheard to say to a companion: "Look! Isn't that a stunning couple!"

"They are looking at you, dear," said Clarke, proudly.

"It was your compliment as much as mine," she insisted, laughing and blushing like a schoolgirl.

"It was for both of us," he said with a tone of finality: "for are not we twain one, now and evermore, before God and man?"

And he heaved a deep sigh of masculine satisfaction.

CHAPTER VIII

CLARKE had selected for their autumn honeymoon the White Horse Inn, a famous hotel in the Catskills, much patronized at that season of the year. It was with quiet elation that, for the first time, he signed the register: "Mr. and Mrs. Chester Clarke." There was something sacramental in the prosaic act, a jewel of a great moment in the plainest of settings.

Hard by the hotel stood the Episcopal Church, built in memory of a soldier of the Revolution. There they went the next morning. It was Communion Sunday. A sense of utter peace came to Clarke as the service proceeded. The music flooded his soul like sunlight, and the sunlight filtering through the softly stained windows seemed to turn to music. Louise and he were very close together in that holy hour.

After the service she went to the chancel, and, kneeling, took communion. Never had the forms of ceremonial religion seemed to Clarke so justified, so far removed from

need of justification. Never had faith and reason seemed to flow so harmoniously in one deep channel of the spirit's life. Doctrines — such as transubstantiation — fell away. There remained only the beautiful symbolism of an act wherein the dross of human nature was momentarily non-existent, and only the pure gold of faith and joy remained. When Louise returned to him, there was a light in her eyes that revealed to him the hitherto unplumbed depths of her spiritual nature. She was on the heights. An air of glory shone round about them. He had not the philosophy at that moment of exaltation to ponder the value of the fact that he, who had not taken part in the ritual, shared the rapture equally with her who had. His whole being was one ethereal lake of love, and love laughs at philosophy. He drank his cup of joy to the last drop. He was intoxicated. The world was one thing, he and this divine woman were another. They were one: and the blessed hyperbole of love compressed the history, nature and purpose of all the universe into this one solar fact.

That same afternoon after a cosy cup of tea, they went out to see the sun set and

the night come in. There would be people moving about, so Clarke said:

"Let us go to the summer house on the hill at the back of the hotel. It is not likely that anyone will be there. The view is splendid, and we can have a quiet time enjoying it. But you must take a warm wrap, for it will be chilly before we come in."

They climbed the hill path. It was quite steep, with logs set in for steps at some of the harder places. They went slowly, and without looking back, for he wished to save the view for her to get in all its magnificence at once.

It was worth saving. At the top of the ascent stood an open pavilion, with shutters which could be regulated to suit the weather. It surmounted a long ridge of land, with parallel valleys on either side. Beyond them as they entered it lay higher ranges, reflecting the last flowing colors of the sunset; the windows of a house on the hillside flashed golden fire. Then as they turned to look back in the direction from which they had come, they stood silent, drinking in the beauties of the scene.

The sky was not ablaze, as in summer sunsets, but was painted in pastel tints, pale

green, lavender, pink of the most delicate shade, an opalescent harmony of what seemed to them notes of music made visible. The earth lay still and listened. Brown woods, brown fields, brown roads winding through the peaceful landscape, all silent, all wrapped in the brooding spirit of vesper prayer. A dog barked across the valley a mile away. A wagon rattled down the stony hill road. The sounds passed, and the silence seemed deeper than before. It had been a warm season, and the chirping of field insects was on the air; not the strident chorus of earlier months, but a subdued music that fitted with the subdued tone of nature's autumn hymn.

Reverently the newly married pair stood there, watching the flow of one more day's time rill into the vast, mysterious ocean of eternity. Louise drew close to her husband. Her head rested against his shoulder, his arm was about her. It seemed as though one heartbeat did for both, as if one breath held their two lives in unison. Their fates were one, now and forever; the joy of each making glad the other, and each grieving for the other's hurts. Through life and on into eternity, they were shipmates for the voyage. For weal or woe, one single lot was

theirs. They had passed from fellowship to true community.

As the colors faded from the western sky, they turned to watch the succeeding glory of the moonrise. Clarke helped Louise adjust the wrap about her shoulders, and lowering the shutter behind them to shield her from the breeze that began to move mysteriously in the night veiled valley, they sat and waited. There was the suggestion of light against the black sky line, traced by the contour of the hills and fringed with trees. When the full moon rose majestically above the horizon Clarke quoted Whittier:

"From gold to gray
Our long sweet day
Of Indian Summer fades too soon;
But tenderly
Above the sea
Hangs, white and calm, the hunter's moon."

"It is very, very beautiful," Louise said. "Very beautiful; and what a suggestion of eternity — of eternal peace — there is in a breathless night at the rising of the full moon! How long has Mother Earth worn that same jewel shining at her breast?"

"Who can say? The geologists perhaps —but we have not invited them to visit us tonight. This night belongs to the spirit.

"I have never been afraid of the dark," he continued. "Even as a child I liked it. I used to lie in bed and look out at the stars. Did you ever notice how much individual character they have?

"Once, the first year that I was in preparatory school, a dear friend of mine was very ill. She had been my house mistress in school. She was a friend to all the boys, but somehow she and I seemed always to be special friends. She had known my dear mother, who had died not long before, and she tried, I think, to take her place.

"Well, she was not expected to live. I called every day—she lived some miles out in the country, but they would not let me see her. They said she had been so changed that I would not be able to control myself. One day I stood in the hall, talking to her mother. The old lady was pretty deaf, and I had to raise my voice. The nurse came down, and said, 'Miss Sarah heard Master Chester's voice, and she has asked to see him.' So they decided to have me go up to her room for a moment. When I saw her, I

knew it would be the last time I should ever see her alive. She smiled at me. I held her hand a moment, stooped over, kissed her poor, withered cheek, and went out, unable to say a word.

"She lived several weeks longer. I used to lie in bed, looking out at a certain star that seemed to me to be mounting guard over the house where she lay. When it twinkled brightly, I thought, 'Miss Sarah is having a good night,' and when it seemed feeble and uncertain, I knew it was going hard with her.

"Then one night — the star shone briefly, and disappeared. Miss Sarah died that night. It was not imagination. That star really did not shine that night. It was *her* star."

They were silent a moment, then Louise said:

"That is a beautiful story, Chester! Some folks would scoff at it, but I believe it. And most people would call it a sad story, but I think it a very sweet and cheering one. It helps to prove what I have always said, that we are bound closer than we realize to the mysteries of nature, and that at night we are nearer to God than at any other time."

"Yes, dearest, we are. And you and I are living very near to Him now. He has been very good to us."

"He was good to give you to me," she said, resting one hand lightly on his knee, and looking into his face.

"And," he said, "God has given me the best that life can hold, in sending you to me. I feel that some unseen force was drawing us together through the years—that you were meant for me, and I for you."

Clarke would have been more or less than human if the thought of her earlier marriage had never oppressed him, but he had refused to let it dwell in his mind. And Louise never said a word that made it necessary for him to choose between mentioning the topic and openly avoiding it. To her it was apparently a sealed chapter in the book of her life. Her children were not a memorial of it, they were simply part of her.

So she said, "Yes, dear; and I am so happy, now that we belong to each other forevermore. I shall be glad when we can announce our marriage, and solemnize it publicly. My dear father will be so pleased, and it will be so much better for Ernest and Alice."

"Alice made me very happy, the dear child, with her letter. Do you not think she will be a strong ally, in trying to win Ernest over to the idea of our marriage — without letting him know it is anybody's suggestion but his own?"

"It will help, but of course I have cautioned her. We shall have to go slowly with Ernest. Life has been most kind to me, dear — giving me such children, and such a husband."

"It is a tremendous responsibility, Louise," he said. "You may be sure I appreciate it, and it shall be my constant endeavor, in every thought, every word, every act, to measure up to it. I would make any sacrifice, any sacrifice for your sake. Much has been given to me, and much shall be required of me. But these are the responsibilities that bring with them strength for the performance of all the duties they impose, and I have no fear."

"Nor have I," she said. "We are strong, both of us; we have an important mission to perform, for the future of those two young souls is in our hands, to be moulded by our wisdom. We need to be very, very wise, Chester!"

"Never fear—love will point the way," he exclaimed. "I feel perfectly confident that things will soon be settled as we wish to have them. We shall have our public wedding, that wretched business of the will must soon be ended, your father and mother will be happy in their new home—and you and I, you and I with the children in ours!"

Another silence fell; one of those intervals when vocal communication became inadequate and wordless communion took its place. Then:

"Chester," she said, "you may think it foolish—no, I don't think you will—I'm sure you won't."

She paused.

"What, dear one?" he asked. "I can promise you before I know what it is that I won't think it foolish. Nothing that you think or say is foolish to me."

"Only this, sweetheart: God has been so kind to us that we must do something to give expression to our gratitude. It is not enough to sing a psalm of thanks, we must actually do something to prove that we are grateful."

"Splendid! and what shall it be?"

"Well," she said, "the only way to prove

our gratitude is to do something that will give lasting expression to our thanks. I want to take some of my money and endow some form of useful charity — something that will be so useful that no one will think of it as charity, something that will shine into the lives of people as naturally and freely as the sunlight."

"That is a beautiful idea, and I am more proud of you than ever."

"Then you are willing?" she asked.

"Willing?" he repeated, "more than willing — anxious, envious because the idea is yours and not a bit mine."

"No, it shall be ours!"

"I shall make it so, dear, as far as I can, by contributing as much as I am able toward financing it. Have you decided what form it shall take?"

"Not definitely, but I think I should like, of all things, to bring music into the lives of those who hear so little of it — "

"The very thing!" he cried. "Tomorrow we shall plan it, and take the first steps.

"And now," he said, "it is getting late, and dinner is waiting. Come, we must scamper down."

And, standing a moment hand in hand,

with a prayer in their hearts, they went back to the house—happy husband and wife, still, like the poet's "happy maiden and lover, dreaming the old dream over."

Life was at high tide for Chester Clarke.

CHAPTER IX

WEEKS flew by, and it was time to plan for Christmas. The children were to have two weeks vacation from school, and Chester and Louise determined to devote their time particularly to them. It was decided that she should bring them on to Boston for a visit of four or five days, since they had never seen the city; then Clarke was to go with them all to Washington, where he would leave Mrs. Willoughby and Alice, while he and Ernest went South for the quail shooting.

Ernest greeted the proposal enthusiastically. Mr. Clarke was going to help him select a gun — his first gun — and whatever else in the way of equipment might be needed to fit him for the field.

Clarke met them at the Huntington Avenue station. He was certain that no happier party than his could have been found in all the throng of arriving travellers or the friends who welcomed them. Alice was the first to see him. She ran forward and threw herself into his arms. He caught her up, and kissed her. The other greetings were

less effusive but far from formal. They were witnessed with interest by a friend of Clarke's who had ridden in the same car with "the very stunning widow" and her children. He spoke of her in that way to Clarke the next day; and this was the beginning of a new phase of Clarke's love-history.

At all times and under all circumstances Clarke had been on his guard lest a word, or an expression of his face, might betray the secret or cause comment or speculation. Having agreed to play the game, he was determined to abide by its rules in every detail. It had been far from easy, but he had never wavered or faltered in his purpose.

Louise had not been quite so steadfast. By word and act she was continually exciting curiosity or interest that filled him with apprehension. If "protective coloration" was difficult for him, it was almost a complete impossibility for her. And yet it was on her behalf that the plan of concealment had been adopted. Clarke had had some anxious moments, but they were as nothing beside the test to which he was at present subjected.

He was now in the country of his own

people, and at every turn they met friends or acquaintances of his. That they would admire the lady was inevitable. That they would be curious was natural. That the questions would be more or less embarrassing was a foregone conclusion. That Louise would help him through his difficulties, or even perceive their existence, was unlikely. When she was not completely oblivious to this aspect of the situation, she was actually enjoying it. She craved attention. She did not calculate consequences.

He dined with Louise and the children on the night of their arrival. The same sense of pride and satisfaction came over him that had been his in Toronto. Now, however, it was intensified by the constant consciousness of the new relationship. How he would have liked to let the world know that this beautiful woman was his wife!

He recognized and bowed to several persons at nearby tables. Were they curious? If so, they derived no satisfaction from Chester Clarke's conduct! He maintained exactly that deportment which would have been his had Mrs. Willoughby been, let us say, his brother's wife come to town for a visit.

Louise might, however, have furnished a clue for the guidance of the curious. There was nothing of the sister-in-law about the way in which, unconsciously and therefore the more obviously, her eyes would rest upon him. Nor was there any in-law about the manner of her taking his arm, afterward, in the street. The way she drew close to him, the way she looked up into his face, was certainly quite enough to suggest, at least, that there was something more than the platonic Idea of affection between them.

Her costuming increased the difficulty. She dressed, in Boston, just as she would have dressed in New York; and the oriole is bound to be conspicuous, among the neat little brown wrens. In New York she was in competition with an extravagance of style unknown in the Capital of Puritania. The cultured ladies of Boston dress, for the street, in a fashion proverbial for its modesty. The ladies of Boston society reserve their indulgence in costly and brilliant apparel for Grand Opera, select functions, or the privacy of their own homes. Louise coruscated in public.

One evening, when they were going to the theatre, Louise consulted Clarke upon the

choice of a gown; should she wear the less conspicuous one, or the one of bolder cut and color, that Clarke recalled had attracted attention when she had worn it in New York?

Ever anxious to avoid publicity that might imperil the execution of their compact, Clarke declared in favor of the less showy garment. He assumed that she would understand his reason and endorse his decision; but he saw that he had piqued her. Quick to find justification for her every whim, he told himself he must not accuse her of failing to understand him and his motives: she had, perhaps, thought that he held her guilty of a desire to bask in public attention, when actually her one wish had been to make as brilliant a showing as possible for his sake, as her escort.

Thus it came about that on all occasions and from all sides came the questionings of his friends. "Who was the pretty lady I saw you with this morning?" asked a member of the Kickers Club, as the set he lunched with called itself. "That was a peach of a girl you had with you last night," remarked one of his office associates. Even the learned Judge of the Motion Session

of the Court, who had known him as a confirmed bachelor, took occasion, when he stepped up to the bench to present an *ex parte* matter, to whisper Mr. Weller's word of caution: "Beware of the vidders, Samivel." As for his women friends, they went almost to the limit of politeness in besieging him with questions about the beautiful woman who was so much in his company.

On several occasions he had to introduce her, but the conversation never got any further than that she had come on from her home in the West for a few days in Boston. Taking care that it stopped there, he was inwardly aflame with desire to have it go further, and reveal the whole truth.

One thing, however, in their relations at this time was ideal, and won his unqualified approval. That was her attitude toward his relatives and the two or three close personal friends to whom, upon his return from Topeka, he had made known the fact of his engagement.

They drove out to Brookline one afternoon, so that she might be presented to Clarke's sister and aunt. The two ladies lived in an apartment, small but adequate to their limited needs.

Louise carried roses to them, and she kissed the ladies, each in turn, with a warmth of affection that went far toward establishing her in their favor. The conquest was complete when she assured them that she did not intend to take Chester away from them, but only begged them to admit her, as a new member, to the family group.

Chester and Louise stayed for tea, and "Sister Gertie" showed Louise the family heirlooms. She also greatly admired the portrait of Chester's mother done by Sargent, and remarked how much he resembled her. Even the old family album was brought out, and with much laughter on the part of the ladies and many unavailing protests by Clarke, a series of pictures of him from the tender age of two on to his latest photograph was shown and variously commented upon.

Clarke was in high spirits when they returned to town, for he felt that his choice of a wife had received the unqualified approval of his own kin.

Clarke and Louise set apart one of the afternoons when the children had gone to a matinée to the delightful task of locating their new home. Clarke had selected two or

three sites upon which Louise was to pass judgment.

They finally agreed upon a location on Beacon Street with a view over the Charles River basin into the setting sun. On this drive they discussed many details of their future domestic affairs, and Louise expressed a desire to retain her old servants and livery.

There was but one incident that marred this happy time for Clarke. He had presented one of his friends to Louise, in the parlors of her hotel. They had had a jolly conversation in which it was discovered that they had several friends in common. It chanced that Clarke was called away that afternoon, and he had sent word to Louise that he would not be able to see her till the following day.

Then, on the morning of the day before Christmas, he had taken Ernest down town with him to be fitted to a gun. Alice went with them, for the walk. By chance reference in the children's talk, Clarke learned that their mother had had dinner with his friend on the night of his absence. Even if he could have brought himself to speak to her about it, he knew from past experience

that her reply would have been: "Of course, you perfectly understand!"

He had heard that expression from her many times, and many times he had read it in her letters. She had invariably used it when, as in this case, he did not at all "understand."

How did it happen that neither his friend nor his wife had mentioned the incident? There was only one explanation he could accept: it simply had happened that neither of them had thought to mention it.

They had selected the location where they were to live and decided upon the livery of their servants. Clarke had given the children a good time. He had taken Ernest to see Harvard, and had shown them both Bunker Hill, Faneuil Hall, and the Old State House. They had been to a matinée at the Colonial and to Keith's. They had taken lunch at the Market Place and at his club. For Christmas, he had given Ernest a game bag, and Alice a necklace of coral beads. On Christmas Day they had enjoyed a skating party at Jamaica Pond.

It had been a happy week — with only the one little blemish; and now it was time for the journey South.

CHAPTER X

THE train from the North with Chester Clarke and Ernest aboard pulled into the station at Henderson, North Carolina, at four o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Willoughby and Alice had left it at Washington, where they would await the return of the hunting party.

This was Ernest's first experience of the South, and Clarke pointed out the objects of interest as they journeyed along. They had a glimpse of Libby Prison and of the defences about Petersburg, through which the Union Army had broken on that memorable Sunday morning, the news of which reached Jefferson Davis in church and caused the evacuation of Richmond.

Then the road ran through a rolling country in which forests of long leaf pine gave way to cotton and cornfields, surrounding a mansion house and dotted here and there by log cabins — the homes of the black man.

All of this was new and strange to the Western lad. It was to him like journeying into a far country.

They found Ralph Gray waiting for them with a "hitch"—a pair of horses and a two seated wagon that had seen better days—and stowing their baggage under the seats they were off.

It was a fifteen-mile drive to Williamsburg, which before the war had been known as the garden spot of North Carolina. The roads were very heavy, crossing at times running streams where the water rose nearly to the axles, and it was seven o'clock when they turned into the driveway that led to Captain Gray's house.

Soon lights appeared in the windows of a large mansion house, and the barking of dogs heralded their approach.

The Captain was at the paling when the team came to a stop. Clarke jumped out and grasped his hand. He was a tall, lank man, with a broad forehead, and a deep scar in his cheek where a minie ball had entered. His left arm hung nearly useless at his side. He was a graduate of the University of Virginia and still read his classics. Clarke had hunted on the Captain's plantation a number of seasons and was a welcome visitor.

The family consisted of the Captain, his wife, and son, Ralph, a man of Clarke's age.

"This is the young man I wrote you about, Captain. Ernest, this is Captain Gray."

"I am glad to see you," said the Captain, "very glad to welcome you to my home."

The party entered the house through a door that the Captain boasted was never shut, followed by two or three dogs and as many negroes, in possession of the baggage.

Ernest was presented to Mrs. Gray—a gentlewoman, as he saw at a glance. Then they were shown to their room, a large square one, with two huge beds standing side by side, against the wall. Pieces of furniture in various stages of dilapidation were placed about the room. A fire blazed on the hearth.

In a few moments they had removed the stains of travel, and were seated at the dining room table, to which the Captain had escorted them with dignified courtesy. There was a moment's silence while he said grace, and then he bade Clarke and Ernest fall to, since they must be famished after their long drive in the keen winter air.

And what a table! It groaned with plenty. There were at least four varieties of pork—chine and jowl and spareribs, and

sausage meat; there were beaten biscuit and corn pone; there were home-made condiments and relishes; there were preserved peaches and several kinds of cake, with steaming coffee in big cups, and there were the Captain and his wife to insist upon their taking another helping.

When they could eat no more, the party repaired to the living room and gathered about the roaring fire to smoke their pipes and plan for the morrow's campaign. Jess was called in consultation, a negro so black that when he made his appearance it was the Captain's little joke to say that a shower must be coming up, it had grown dark so suddenly.

What with the long drive, the substantial supper and the warmth of the room, Clarke and Ernest soon found themselves nodding, and were off to bed under the escort of Jess, who went up to see that they had everything to make them comfortable.

After a breakfast as satisfying as the supper had been, Clarke and Ernest, with Ralph as escort, mounted their horses and rode out of the yard to the joyful barks of the setters, Dan and Dandy.

Broad fields of corn stubble, defined by

Virginia rail fences, stretched away to "branches" dense with trees and bushes. Through these, the horses moved abreast while the dogs circled ahead, their noses to the ground and with a glance back now and then for a wave of the hand from Ralph. In less than five minutes the quick swish of Dan's tail and his cautious advance in one direction indicated that he had found game. He moved forward twenty feet and came to a point, his tail straight out, one fore paw raised. Working in from another angle Dandy "honored" his point, and the two stood motionless.

"They have found them," said Ralph, and the three, throwing the bridle rein over their horses' heads, slipped to the ground and advanced behind the dogs, Clarke and Ernest loading as they did so.

While Ralph spoke a word of caution to the dogs, Clarke stationed Ernest well to the front, with brief instructions as to how to hold his gun and aim when the birds went up, and not to fire too soon.

There was a quick, sharp whir of many wings and the covey rose. The almost instantaneous discharge of Clarke's and Ernest's guns followed; one bird dropped.

Ernest dashed forward and, catching it up, turned with an expression of triumphant joy in his face. He had not heard Clarke's gun and he was sure he had killed his bird. Clarke glanced at Ralph as much as to say, don't question it, and the two congratulated the delighted boy.

The birds had flown into the branch, and after the dogs had found three singles, two of which Clarke killed, they remounted their horses and moved on.

The hunt continued until late in the afternoon with an intermission for luncheon. In the afternoon Ralph joined in the shooting. They flushed a dozen coveys during the day, and out of this number Ernest claimed three birds, while Clarke and Ralph each had a good bag.

They were back at the house in time to clean their guns and wash up before supper.

The two days following were much like the first, and Ernest had ten birds to his credit which he carefully preserved to take back to his mother.

On the last evening of their stay they were gathered round the open fire. From a stone trough on the table, the men replen-

ished their pipes from time to time, with the "bright" tobacco grown on the plantation. Clarke turned the conversation on the Civil War; he was manœuvring for the benefit of Ernest, who had been eager to hear how the Captain came by his wounds.

"You were on Stonewall Jackson's staff?" he said.

"Yes," replied the Captain, "I was with him the night he was killed. We had been moving into a position where we could strike the Yankee flank in the morning. We would have rolled them up and captured the whole army. It was providential for the Union cause that Jackson was killed. As a good Presbyterian, I am bound to believe that his death was foreordained."

"How was your arm hurt?" Ernest ventured to ask.

"That was in defending a bridge. The Yankees got in behind us. I ordered my men to scatter and each one take care of himself.

"I ran for a clump of bushes. A trooper emptied his revolver at me, called out for me to surrender, but I kept on; then he rode alongside of me, struck me across the arm with his sabre and took me prisoner. I got

this wound in my face reconnoitring—a sharpshooter caught me. That is only one of the fortunes of war. The bullet came out of the back of my neck. General John B. Gordon was wounded in exactly the same way. We were fighting Chamberlain and the 20th Maine at the time. Oh, there was a soldier for you! No more splendid officer, no more chivalrous gentleman crossed the Potomac during the war. He was *sans peur et sans reproche.* We Rebels, as they called us then, have reason to revere his memory. General Chamberlain's salute of honor to the Confederate army laying down its arms at Appomattox was sublime! It will be his enduring memorial."

"Did you own slaves?" asked Ernest.

"Oh, yes. I had many. We treated them well and as a rule they were contented, I might say happy. We used to go up to Raleigh year after year, and take our accustomed seats in the legislature. Here we passed such laws as we regarded essential to the institution of slavery.

"We sold a slave or two now and then when we wanted a holiday at Long Branch or White Sulphur, or a trip to Europe. A good house-bred slave was worth two thou-

sand dollars and up. Field hands sold for one thousand or so. The Abolitionists of New England used to raise a holler but we never thought for an instant that the artisans of the north would dare come down here and attack our sovereign State.

"I once rode up to my neighbor's door. The slave who came to lead my horse away was his son. I saw the father's look in the boy's face; it was unmistakable. That sickened me. I favored freeing them after that."

"But you fought in the war," interposed Clarke.

"Of course I did—I went with my State when it seceded. That was my duty. We had the Constitution on our side. Why, I am told that one of the authorized books in use at West Point when Robert E. Lee was a cadet there, national institution though it was, recognized the right of secession.

"I am glad, however, that we lost out. As you look back, you can see that it had got to come.

"I don't know that it ever occurred to you," he continued, turning to Clarke, "but as I look at it, it was a mere matter of history repeating itself.

"When the Normans invaded England, the Saxons under Harold went down before them. That was the first encounter between two irreconcilable forces, and the man in armor won. They met again in Cromwell's time — the Cavalier and the Roundhead, and this time the Roundhead had the better of the argument.

"The third and last time it was the Puritan of New England against the Cavalier of Virginia, and you won once for all. There was no place in modern civilization for the man on horseback. I do not mean, of course, that every man on the one side or the other was Puritan or Cavalier, — I mean only that the dominant spirit was the one or the other."

"Yes, but your Virginian was an American. He was a lover of liberty," interposed Clarke.

"True, he was a lover of liberty — liberty for his own class — but he was not a lover of democracy. He was skilled in statecraft, a born orator, and he made a superb soldier. He was generous, hospitable, brave — that is the best that can be said of him. He was not a scholar, he was not a philanthropist, he was not a theologian. He was not a poet.

He was not a scientist. He was not a musician. He had no inventive genius. He was not a business man. Can you imagine a Lee selling anything over a counter? No, the type of man that dominated the South was a back number, out of harmony with democracy. He had got to go. I am one of them and my generation cannot be made over. Like the Indians we can read our doom in the setting sun. The next generation may do better." He paused as if reflecting, and the conversation took another turn with the old soldier's next remark.

"You may think I am a poor man," he said, laughing, "but I am not. I am rich. I can prove it to you," and turning to an old desk he drew out a bundle of papers. "I put all my money into Confederate securities. I was sure we would win. Here they are."

"How much?" asked Clarke, looking them over.

"About one hundred thousand dollars."

Ralph had taken down his banjo and begun to tune and strum it. He sang several negro melodies in good voice. Then he struck into a song with the refrain, "When the war came and ruined my beautiful

Southern home." When he finished no one broke the silence.

Clarke sat a little back from the group. A flickering light from the fire played upon the sturdy form of the Captain, enhanced the sweet dignity of his wife's face, illuminated the ebony skin of the black man crouched in the chimney corner. It picked out the bare patches on the wall where the plaster had fallen off and glinted on cracked windowpanes.

Clarke felt a lump rising in his throat. He stood up and, noting the lateness of the hour, broke up the party.

In their bedroom, Ernest, who had been deeply impressed by the evening's conversation, exclaimed:

"What a wonderful man Captain Gray is!"

"Yes," answered Clarke, "these Southerners were wonderful men. They fought to the last ditch for the cause that they believed to be right. Their valor is one of the best American traditions. They came back to their devastated homes and no man has ever heard them whimper. Their wonderful pride of family and race has saved them from the fate that would have overtaken

them if they had n't possessed it. The coming generations will make good. If materialism ever gets the better of our national ideals, these men will be heard from. They will see that the Republic suffers no harm. When you marry pick out a Southern girl."

CHAPTER XI

RALPH took Clarke and Ernest the next morning to the station. They were returning by a different route. It was an eighteen-mile drive. The train was reported over an hour late, so at the urgent solicitation of Clarke, Ralph had started on his way home without awaiting its arrival.

Clarke and Ernest sat down in the small waiting room, which was vacant, with their baggage and guns beside them. Ernest carried the precious quail in the game bag slung from his shoulder. Clarke had taken a book from his satchel, and was reading, when a man entered the room and sat down opposite them. After a few minutes he said, "Have you been hunting, gentlemen?" Thinking that the question was one of polite inquiry as one might pass the time of day, Clarke replied, "Yes, sir, we have been quail hunting for the last three days."

"Did you kill any game?"

"Oh, yes, we had very fair success."

Then after a pause the man inquired, "May I see your license?"

"What license?" asked Clarke, beginning to sense that something was back of this questioning.

"Your license to shoot game in this State."

"I have no license. I never heard that one was required. I have been hunting on Captain Gray's estate as his guest," and he resumed his reading as if to close the conversation.

But the Southerner was not to be shaken off so easily. "If you gentlemen have no licenses, I must put you under arrest and take you before the magistrate or lodge you in jail."

Clarke saw that the situation was desperate. Not to consider his own plight, or reasons for returning North by this train, what would Louise think of his fitness to be a father to her darling boy if he landed him in jail the first time he took him from her sight?

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Clarke, "and what is this about the license?"

"I am the State Game Warden. If you have any doubt about it, here are my papers. Nobody can shoot in this State without a license."

"Where can we get a license?"

"They cost ten dollars and fifty cents apiece, and you get them at the County Clerk's office." He paused as if thinking. "I reckon I could take your money and send them to you."

"Well," said Clarke, beginning to see a solution of the situation, "supposing you take our money and give us a receipt. I shall, of course, inquire into the matter. If it is all right you will hear nothing further from me."

The two men walked into the office of the station agent, and sitting at a table, Clarke wrote on a telegraph blank: "Received of Chester Clarke of Boston and Ernest Willoughby of Topeka, ten dollars and fifty cents each, total twenty-one dollars, in payment of two licenses to hunt in the State of North Carolina for the season of 19—"

As he was writing this, the game warden said to the station master, "That young feller's game bag ought to be searched. I believe he is carrying game out of the State."

Clarke affected not to hear this remark and, hurrying through the transaction, handed over the money as the game warden signed the receipt.

"Now," said Clarke briskly, placing the

receipt in his pocketbook, "as we have adjusted our matters satisfactorily, I will bid you good day," and he returned to the waiting room and to Ernest with the remark of the warden still in his ears. What did it mean? He had not long to wait, before he found out, for he saw the game warden come out of the "Grocery and Notions" store, standing hard by, in company with two men. He left them at the platform of the station and, walking toward Ernest, but addressing his remark rather to Clarke, said in a peremptory tone and manner, "I believe that boy has quail in that bag, and I am going to search it. There is a heavy penalty for carrying game out of this State."

It seemed to Clarke almost as if he could hear the ten quail in the bag calling — as if he could see their feathers protruding from the bag. Once the warden's hand touched it, and in a very literal sense the game would be up. Ernest would be under arrest — with who could say what results. Clarke thought quickly and acted more quickly still. He knew that the quail in the game bag and a ticket for Washington in the hands of the boy waiting for a train that would cross the frontier into Virginia before making a stop,

would warrant an arrest and conviction. He knew also that to interfere with an officer in the discharge of his duty was a State's prison offence.

On the other hand, while it was perfectly evident that there was something in the bag, the officer did not *know* that it was game. He only inferred so. It might be ammunition or any one of a dozen things. If he made the arrest on suspicion alone and found no game, he would be in the wrong and liable for any consequences that might follow. Would he insist upon searching the bag? There was a chance that he would not if Clarke interposed, and as this was the only chance to save the boy, he took it.

Stepping in front of the advancing officer he said:

"Stop a moment. You and I have made one arrangement, and that ought to cover this matter. You claimed that we were liable to arrest for hunting without a license. I accepted your interpretation of the situation and put up my money, and I was led to believe that the incident was closed—that we were free to go on our way.

"Now, I don't know the text of your law, but I am a lawyer myself, and I do know

that there is no law in North Carolina or anywhere else in this United States that will authorize you to search that bag. You have n't any warrant and the boy is n't under arrest. You can't search a person, Mr. Officer, who is not under arrest, and if you attempt it in this case, I shall resist you."

Ernest looked at the two men in awe and alarm. They stood facing one another less than two feet apart. There was resolution in the eye of each and a tense shut of their jaws. They were about the same age, height and weight.

Ernest saw the butt of the officer's revolver protruding from his hip pocket and he wondered if he would draw it.

Two factors probably settled the matter without any bloodshed, or jail sentence; one was that it was incumbent upon the warden to make the first move, the other that he faced a man who was, as he realized, his intellectual and social superior.

A certain dominating force in the man before him raised a doubt in his mind, and hesitating, he was lost.

"Very well," he said, after a long silence, "if you will admit that you have hunted game in this State so that I am not called

upon to prove it in case you make any trouble about the license, I 'll let the matter drop."

"I have already admitted that, and I will repeat it again in the presence of your witnesses — call them in."

The warden did so.

"Gentlemen," said Clarke, as the men lined up beside the officer, "I am prepared to state in your presence that this young man and I have been hunting quail for the last three days on Captain Gray's plantation and have killed some birds."

The party then filed out and as their departing footsteps died away, Clarke wondered if he had seen the last of them. He was painfully conscious of the birds in that bag and was greatly relieved when the train at last arrived that took them safely across the frontier into Virginia.

In closing the account of this adventure to his mother, Ernest said:

"After I saw Mr. Clarke facing that officer, I began to think that you needed someone bigger than I am to fight your battles, and if Mr. Clarke wants to marry you, as I think he does, I won't find any fault."

PART THREE

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

THE day that saw the departure of Louise for the West marked the beginning of a new and most important era in Chester Clarke's life. Louise had had the anticipation of new adventures to sustain her at the moment of parting; he had nothing to look forward to in the immediate future but the dreariness of separation. She would be seeing new places and people, and doing things spiced with the pleasant flavor of novelty. He would be living the old life, the life he had lived before he had met her. The only difference would be that as he went about, on business or on pleasure bent, he would be conscious every moment of the new and unrelaxing desire for a particular companionship. In the city's crowded streets, he would be a lonely man. Surrounded by friends, he would have none with whom he might share his disappointment and his hopes. True, it was not for long,

but lonely people do not measure time as others do.

Knowing that time would drag if he counted the hours, he laid out a stiff course of work, and kept himself at it with the most intense application of which he was capable. This was not entirely as an anodyne; he had lost some ground in his practice, with all this running about the country. There were arrears of work to be made up, and certainly he had now an imperatively practical reason for pursuing the policy of intensive cultivation in his professional preserve. Always a hard worker, he now worked harder than ever, striving steadily toward the one clearly defined objective of professional advancement. He was determined to rise as high as his powers of mind would carry him in the scale of professional standing. Money was not his goal, but reputation. He was moving all the time, and all his motion was progressive. It was now all for The Family, and he dreamed of the home that they were to establish.

Louise had been gone a month, and Clarke was taking stock of things. He sat alone in his rooms, with a small stack of letters spread out before him. They told the story

of the past four weeks. First, there had come the letter telling of her safe arrival. She and Alice, whom she had taken with her, had reached the Coast just in time to get acquainted with the new house and re-acquainted with the old folks, as Louise expressed it, and to rest from the journey before the day of that great and joyous event, the house-warming, to which she had been summoned. She wrote about the house:

"You will remember that when I wrote you from Topeka, after your visit there, I was not very much interested in the new house. I referred to you many of the questions that Father and Mother were asking from day to day, but my own thoughts were fixed upon the home in the East that would some day soon be ours — yours and mine, and the children's. Of course, my interest in that is still great, because the time is drawing nearer when the dream shall be realized. But now that I am here, in the midst of things, it is only natural that it should mean a great deal more to me than it could possibly have meant before. And I know you will enjoy hearing about it.

"The house is just a short distance outside the city, in a most beautiful region. It

is in a colony of wealthy people, who have the loveliest homes you could imagine. We have wide grounds, to which the landscape gardener has devoted his finest art — the art which consists in taking nature's hints for the development of the site, and just adding here and there the last, finishing touch which nature seems somehow or other to have overlooked. The plantation has been arranged in such a way as to give the finest views, on one side over the bay, and on the other, toward the highlands. It is a place fit for a royal family, and I feel like a queen."

She went on to describe their new manner of life with a wealth of detail which threw a brilliant illumination upon another letter which came, a day or two later, from Mr. Malsby.

"My dear Son-to-be," he wrote, "I wish you were out here with us. It's great. We're living like kings. I've put just about everything into this. This housewarming is going to smash all records. I'm having my fling late, but it's going to be an all-fired good one. My friend, Senator Hooper, off of whom I bought this property, is giving us a boost that puts us way up top. He's taken this housewarming business for

his own job, all I got to do is foot the bills, and the bigger they come the better I like it. He 's taken a great shine to Louise, he says she ought to be It out here, and it won't be his fault if she does n't have the whole Coast at her feet in no time. He has all kinds of influence, and if anybody can bring it about, he 's the boy. You better leave Boston to take care of itself for a while, and you come out here and enjoy life, with us. You 'd think Louise was a different woman, she 's so happy and gay. Everybody admires her already, and I can see she is going to be a great favorite, Queen of the Coast. She will make a big hit when the Big Day comes. You ought to be mighty proud, my boy, to be engaged to such a woman."

Here Clarke paused in his reperusal of the correspondence. "Queen of the Coast"? The vulgar phrase disturbed him just as it had when the letter arrived. He meant to be generous, and rejoice in his wife's triumphs. Nothing could have been surer than that she would win them. He did not begrudge her any of the pleasures that life in these soft surroundings must bring to a person of her character and tastes. He could not be jealous of her admirers, three thou-

sand miles away! He could only, as they had done in the first happy days of their love, "trust and be true." Be true? He could not have been otherwise if he had tried. His life had been utterly changed by her entry into it, and it must henceforth follow a course quite beyond any controlling power of his. That was the simple fact. As for trusting—anything else would have been a denial of his own judgment in taking her for his wife; it would have been unjust to her, and unworthy of himself. When he had plighted his own troth, he stood ready to keep it in the face of death or any of the powers of life. And where he had placed his trust, he expected, as a matter of course, a similar unswerving loyalty.

But—and this was the end of the argument in his mind—this was not a natural situation. He and she belonged together. Nothing should have been allowed to come between them—not the severing miles of space, not the companionship of others, however pleasant and safe. People live in the presence of an enemy, and there is risk enough of disaster without giving him added opportunity to indulge his hostile inclinations. We must guard our treasures, with

unrelaxing vigilance, in this world of unavoidable exposure to hazard. He ought to have insisted on her staying with him. Would it have availed? She had an imperious will. The wish of the moment was her supreme guide. She could not brook dictation. To command her was impossible, even to persuade her was almost so — and not because she meant to be obdurate, but because of her own superlative belief in the fitness of her wishes to prevail and to govern not only her own conduct but that of others. No wonder Clarke was restless!

With a sigh, he resumed the rereading of his letters. At the next one, the little pucker between his eyes smoothed itself out. This letter was from Alice, and was so naïvely friendly, so simple and direct in its childlike expression of affection and good will, that it made Clarke wish we could all be children all our lives.

Then came the long letter in which Louise told of the housewarming — and her triumph. As he read, his frown deepened, and when he had finished, the paper fell to the floor, his head dropped forward and rested in his cupped hands, and he sat motionless through many long minutes.

"My dear," she said, "the great night has come and gone, and I am a very happy woman. The house was like a palace in the 'Arabian Nights.' The grounds were like the scene in 'Lalla Rookh,' in Paine's fireworks that used to take us to fairyland when we were children. It was all so gorgeously lovely, I can hardly settle down long enough to tell you about it.

"All the best people were here. Some of them, no doubt, came prepared to scoff, but I am sure that none went away with any doubt of the ability of the new people to do things right. Father spared no expense, and everything was perfect. The decorations were nothing less than magnificent. Fountains played streams of colored water, the flower beds were lighted by a specially installed system of colored bulbs, there were thousands of lights in the trees and shrubs, and soft music that seemed part of the air itself, so delicately was it played. The house was a bower of blossoms. The men and women were the handsomest lot of people I have ever seen.

"Senator Hooper took me under his wing, and you may be sure that nothing escaped his attention that could make me happier.

He sat out a dance with me, and told me that if he had a daughter of his own he could not have been better pleased than to have her exactly like me. He said that he would like to do everything for me that he would have done for his daughter, and that I must be sure to let him know whenever I wanted anything, because you know, he said, I am pretty near a king out here, and there is nothing you might want that I could not get for you. Wasn't that nice of him? And I am sure he meant it, too.

"Of course we had the best orchestra that could be hired, and as the Senator had insisted that I must play, and as it would not do to cross his wishes at the very outset, I complied. I gave the Jocelyn 'Berceuse,' and Grieg's 'To Spring,' and then, carried away by the spell of the lovely surroundings, I improvised a little. The soft air here makes one feel like a different creature from the person one used to be in the East, and the magic of the night and the lovely surroundings simply carried me out of myself, until it seemed as though I had only to hold the violin, and the music came of its own accord. Never, I know, had I played half so well.

"And what do you think happened? There was a gentleman in the audience who is passionately fond of the best music, and is regarded as one of the best authorities on the Coast, and he was so delighted that he hurried up to me and said: 'Splendid, Mrs. Willoughby! But I must confess you have puzzled me with your selection. I cannot, to save my life, place the last thing you played. I am ashamed of my ignorance, for I did not suppose such beautiful music could exist, and I not know of it. Do, please, enlighten me!' So I told him it was a composition of my own, with a good deal of improvisation. He went into raptures over it, and finally said, in the hearing of a number of people, 'I did not know that we had welcomed a genius into our happy community. We are most fortunate.' Don't you think that was a triumph for the very first night?

"Life here is as different as can be from our dull, cold unromantic life in the East. It suits me absolutely. Why, Chester, I feel as though I had never really lived before. I think I must have been made for this climate, or it for me. It is what I have always craved, without knowing just what it was that I

wanted. I think of you working away there in Boston, and I wish you could have a share in the pleasures that I see await me here. I am going to conquer the Coast! You may laugh, but I shall surely do it.

"And now I must stop, for I must rest this afternoon, to be ready for the festivities that are arranged for tonight. We seem to be starting out on a regular campaign."

She had enclosed a clipping from one of the San Francisco papers. This Clarke did not reread. It ran like this:

"The wealth and fashion of the city assembled last night at The Alhambra, the new villa of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Malsby, newcomers from the East. Never have the stars of our society shone brighter than on this occasion. If the Malsbys and their beautiful daughter, Mrs. Walter Willoughby, had set out with deliberate purpose to capture the Coast they could not have scored a greater triumph.

"The spacious grounds were a revel of light and color, and the best orchestra to be had for money discoursed sweet strains upon the evening airs. Mrs. Willoughby, herself a musician of no mean attainments, won the plaudits of the critical audience with her

splendid rendition of some of the most difficult music written for the violin. If this gifted lady were to take up music as a profession, the great Ysaye himself would be compelled to look to his laurels. A veritable goddess of music, but it is safe to say that this tenderly nurtured daughter of luxury will not dispense the musings of her gifted bow to vulgar ears. It was a triumph indeed for this Dark Lady of the East, and we miss our guess if California does not adopt her. Indeed, it is whispered among the elect that a very distinguished and influential gentleman has already taken the fair one under his wing, and under such auspices it is impossible to predict the heights to which the newcomer may yet attain. There may be in store a brilliant reign for a new Queen of the Coast. Mrs. Willoughby wore—"

One reading of that rhapsody was quite enough for Chester Clarke. It sickened his soul. What right had any one to sully his wife's name with such oozing adulation? It was shameful.

He did not even allow his mind to form the thought which would have expressed his feeling toward any woman who had per-

mitted such things to be said about herself. Could she have prevented it?

She need not have sent him the hateful thing in print!

Perhaps she had sent it simply to let him know what was going on.

Perhaps!

Chester Clarke had had a pretty serious shock.

For the first time in his life, he had to fight against unfaith. It was bitterly hard.

CHAPTER II

FROM the middle of January to the middle of February Clarke spent most of his spare time reading letters from the West. It was not a wholly happy time for him. Each letter gave him something new to think about. A few days after the famous housewarming Louise wrote:

"DEAR ONE:—This morning I had the most glorious horseback ride. We went out into the country, and you cannot imagine how beautiful it is. This is surely the native country of my soul.

"The East is cold, and hard, and the people are like the climate. Where Massachusetts is intellectual, California is passionate. Life here is a thing of joy, not a test of endurance. The heart does not take its orders from the brain. You live, and you enjoy life.

"I can close my eyes, and see poor, dear old Boston—for you know I am really very fond of the town—I can see it now,

deep with snow, icy gales whooping across the Common, the streets clogged, everything bare and bleak. And here it is like spring at its very best. Every breath of air is perfumed, and carries a note of music.

"You despise the word 'lure,' I know, but you must let me use it, for it is really the only word I can think of that expresses the strange power of this country to cast a spell over you. You are lured from one pleasure to another. Even you, dear, with your admirable New England firmness of character, that I so much respect in you, would relax just a little if you could spend a few weeks with us out here. And it would do you good. What jolly times we could have together! I would play to you, evenings, in the moonlight, so that you would believe yourself an enchanted prince, and me the fairy who had cast the spell over you."

Then she wrote about the people:

"Such wonderful people! They are the most hospitable folk in the world. Their hospitality is not like that of the East. It is spontaneous, and insistent. These Californians are always trying to give you a good time, and when they have planned something for your entertainment, they

simply will not take no for an answer. They will carry you away by force, rather than let you escape their kind intentions. Can you guess the name of one lady with whom they do not have to use much violence? I spoke, the other day, about going back to the East. They simply would not hear of it. Why, I had only just come! There were so many things I must see and do. It must not be thought of, at least not until summer. You would have wondered, if you had heard them, how they ever managed to get along before we came. It was all very flattering.

"The Senator especially insisted that I must not think of leaving them. He said it would be cruel to him, after coming into his life and bringing so much light and joy into his dark places — those were his very words — for me to go away and leave him lonelier than if I had never come into his life at all. You know, he has done everything for us, and we cannot help being most grateful to him. It would have taken us years to get ourselves half as well established as we have done in these few weeks, thanks to his mighty influence.

"I told him my dear son was alone on

the other side of the continent, and that I simply must visit him and see that all was well with him, and take my daughter back to school. Of course there was nothing more for him to say, especially when I told him how my whole hope in life was wrapped up in Ernest, and how it was my one ambition to see him grow up to be a fine, strong, clean living, honest and honored man; rich in character, whether he had much or little money.

"The dear old man said he admired and respected my feeling, and that it was one more reason why I should settle here, and make the Coast my permanent home. He said, 'Your boy, who must be a fine fellow, will soon be through with school, the college years will pass quickly, and he will be ready to go into business or a profession. I can, and of course I will, do a great deal to help him get his start.' You will see, dear, what an important consideration this is. It would be a wonderful thing for Ernest to begin his career with a friend like the Senator to make the way smooth for him. Perhaps he ought to go to college here, instead of Harvard. I shall look into it.

"Of course, if we were to settle in the

East, as we have been planning, you would do whatever you could to help, but you could not possibly do the things there that my Senator can do for us here. I haven't the slightest doubt that if you were to come out here and settle, as a lawyer, he would be able soon to get you an important Judgeship, or possibly a diplomatic appointment. Wouldn't it be a splendid thing, after we have our public wedding — and, oh, what a wedding we could have in this wonderful place! — wouldn't it be almost unimaginably fine if we could go abroad as an Ambassador's family, or at least a Minister's? Isn't it worth thinking over pretty seriously? I can see promise of a wonderful future for you, and for Ernest — and for me, too!"

Then came a letter from Mr. Malsby.

"Dear Chester," he wrote, "we are still on deck, and the old boat is bowling along in great style. There 's something in the air out here that gets into you, and I 'm feeling and acting like a kid of twenty. Wish you were with us. By the way, why aren't you? After a fellow's been living here a few weeks, he gets to feeling that everybody ought to be doing just whatever is the most

fun for him. Wind up your business in Boston, come on here, and in a year I bet we 'll be making you Governor.

"Louise is having the time of her life. She 's a general favorite, popular with everybody. There are a lot of fine young lads who are interested in her, old man, and while I know you are as safe with her, being engaged to her, as if you were married to her, still I sort of wish you were out here with us, just so you could look after your own interests a bit more.

"Please forgive an old fellow if he talks too much. There is n't anything to worry about. Of course, that damned money business is still hanging fire, and sometimes I 'm tempted to throw the whole thing up, and let Sharp get away with it. But I 'm not built of quitting stuff, and it goes against the grain even to think of it. Still, I 'll be mighty glad when the thing is settled, and we can go ahead with that wedding, which will be some wedding, or I 'll be the most disappointed man in seven States.

"The Senator is a mighty valuable friend to us, he 's doing everything for Louise. If he was twenty years younger, my boy, I 'd say you 'd better look out for him! You

know how Louise gets 'em all going, she just can't help it; every man she speaks to or looks at begins to think right away he's the only man on earth. You know you thought so, yourself, first thing—and you proved to be the lucky one.

"Well, the Senator is as I said doing just everything for Louise. He's the darndest man for pull you ever heard tell of. He's like the man at the picnic who's got the tickets and the lunch, everybody sticks close to him. Politics or society, it's all the same—see the Senator. He pulls the strings that make the politicians dance, and he says who's going to be who at the parties, he's the whole shootin' match. He puts 'em up, and he knocks 'em down.

"When he says Louise is going to be it, why, you can just bet your bottom dollar that's what she's going to be. It works two ways, as you'll easily see, for if he once changed his mind he could queer her with all the folks as quick as scat. So naturally Louise figures pretty strong on what the Senator'll think of a thing before she up and does it.

"You'd laugh to see the way they work this society game. Politics is nowhere. The

Senator has proposed Louise for membership in pretty near every club and organization the ladies have out here. She 's pretty popular, and partly by that and partly by sheer backing she 's become an officer in half the female lodges. It seems funny to a regular he man, but let me tell you it 's no kid's game, the way the ladies play it. All very simple looking and smooth on the surface, but say — maybe they ain't some tug o' war going on underneath! An ordinary male person 'd be clean done up after a month or so of it, but not the ladies, they thrive on it. And there is n't a one of 'em all has got anything on our Louise when it comes to that game. She 's there with the goods."

This set Clarke thinking harder than ever. The idea of a removal gained force with repetition from different sources. If it seemed desirable to the old man, there must be enough in it to make it worth serious consideration. Clarke gave honest recognition to every argument in favor of it, and assigned to each the utmost value he could without unfairness to his own side of the case. Louise had evidently fallen in love with the Coast country and people. Was that a lasting passion, or a whim of the mo-

ment? The whim of the moment was to one of her temperament the moment's ruling law!

But, granting the sincerity of her conviction, the fact remained that the place for a wife is with her husband, and the place for him is not to be decided on whim. He belonged to the East, he had sprung from its soil, the blood of New England ran in his veins; he was too well established, too deeply rooted, to change now. He could not give up his practice, no matter what prizes might be offered in a new country. It was not a matter of money, not a matter of relative rank; it was a matter of a man's lifework, a matter of pride in completing the structure he had planned and had so successfully begun to rear. Is not the architecture of a career as dear a thing to a man as the safeguarding of her honorable reputation is to a woman? And would a woman hesitate a moment, whatever the inducement, if the price of it were the sacrifice of her honor? The questions answered themselves.

It was simply impossible for him to consider this suggested remaking of his life, and it could not fairly be asked of him. Of course, he told himself, it had not really as

yet, at least, been asked of him with serious intent of moving him to a decision; but the mere suggestion was disquieting. He must do everything he could to get Louise to come back East. It would not be difficult, for she must want to be with him as much as he wanted to have her with him; and besides, he knew that she must be genuinely anxious to visit Ernest and to be near him for some time; so anxious that no persuasions of that confounded old fox of a Senator could hold her back.

What was the use of worrying? he asked himself. He answered the question most positively — no use at all, it was sheer nonsense to waste time on it, the whole thing would straighten itself out in the natural course of events.

But just as he succeeded in bringing himself around to this sensible and rather more comfortable frame of mind, there came another letter which set the machinery of doubt in motion again. In this letter Louise spoke about the house in a way and at a length which showed that she was becoming attached to it with an affection that was going to make it more difficult than ever for her to tear herself away. She was thinking of

it, more and more definitely, as her home. She was being alienated from him.

"I love the place," she wrote, "as I have never loved any other place. It is more truly my home than any other spot of earth has ever been; more, I honestly believe, than any other spot of earth ever can be after this."

She wrote more and more about the money—all for the children's sake. He wrote back to her:

"My Darling:—I do wish you would not let that money occupy your thoughts so much. I know it has to be attended to, but why not leave that to your father and me? It is for your own sake that I suggest it. Such things, if you let them once find lodgment in your mind, have a truly terrible power to drive other, and happier, things out; and if your mind is full of such cares and worries, how can you be happy?

"I want you to be always happy. As I have told you, often and often, I would make any sacrifice of personal interest or desire, pleasure or profit, any sacrifice of my own wellbeing, to contribute to your happiness. You know, dear, that that is not one of those lover's vows at which Jove

laughs, but a deliberate, exact statement of literal truth. I would do anything, give up anything, to make life easier or pleasanter for you. If I could, I would take over the entire burden of this fortune of the children's. But the issue cannot be forced, we must bide our time. When the time comes, you may be sure that your interest, and theirs, will be safeguarded."

He wrote much more, but this was the tenor of the whole long letter; and it was this that led Louise, always impatient of admonition, however well meant and however justified in the fact, to answer petulantly: "You don't understand me, you don't sympathize with me. It is all for the children, there is nothing selfish in it."

As if he had thought or hinted that there was! His sympathy, he knew, was perfect. He thought he understood her better than she understood herself. But, he mused rather bitterly, what man could be sure that he really understood a woman, any woman, even the woman he loved with heart and soul and whose happiness was dearer to him than his own? And this was a form of cynicism he had always particularly despised!

A boyishly frank and friendly letter from

Ernest was the one bright spot these weeks had for Chester Clarke.

He ached for the end of this episode, this intermission in their happiness. She would soon be coming East again. All would be well once more.

CHAPTER III

ON the twenty-first day of March Chester Clarke observed an anniversary. It was just a year since he had met Louise, at that memorable dinner given by the Sons to the Daughters of the American Revolution. The anniversary had been something of a disappointment to him. Disappointments had been coming his way pretty steadily of late.

He had hoped to spend this day, of all days, with Louise; but she had sweetly declared it quite impossible. The twenty-first came on a Thursday, and he had spoken of his plan to come down Wednesday night and return by the midnight train on Thursday night. She was sorry, she said, but she had already arranged to go up to Ernest's school town for the last half of the week. The parents of one of the boys were giving a house party for some of the students who were unable to go home for the Easter holidays, and Ernest had been very anxious to have his beautiful mother there. She had

planned, she said, to cut the visit short and come back to the city on Saturday, so as to be with Clarke for his customary week end visit. She could not possibly disappoint Ernest; nothing could be quite important enough to justify her in such a course. Therefore, Clarke would have to spend the day alone. She would be with him in her thoughts, and he would have to be content with that. They could have their celebration, if he so desired, at the end of the week.

So Clarke had let the matter pass. He would not think, he said, of letting his selfish pleasures interfere with her plans or those of Ernest. He did not even tell her how great a disappointment this was to him. He played the stoic. He observed the anniversary alone. He spent the evening reviewing the events of the year. He had, during this *annus mirabilis*, kept a diary—something he had never before thought of doing. As he read it through, this evening, its entries furnished a framework for the story, as he reconstructed it in his mind.

It was a bright and happy story, up to the time of his wife's departure, at the beginning of the New Year, for the Coast. After that the spirit of it subtly changed.

Now for the first time he realized clearly how great the change had been. He had been vaguely uncomfortable, these last three months; increasingly, but still vaguely, uncomfortable. There had been no definite grievance to supply a nucleus for his discontent. Now, however, as he recalled in swift review the events of those weeks, their significance took more definite shape in his mind. Each one stood out with startling clearness, and each one took on new meaning from juxtaposition with the others. The chronological sequence predicated, all too clearly, the possible logical consequence.

It was with the entry of February 15, when he went to meet her in New York, that the sinister suggestion began to assume sharper outline, dark forms of fear to emerge from the chiaroscuro of the film.

Feb. 15—Met Louise. What a joy, as the minutes passed, to know that each one brought her nearer. When the train drew in, I could see that my Louise was Queen of the Railroad, whether or not she had yet become Queen of the Coast. The porters almost fought for the honor of assisting her, while other passengers went uncared for. How beautiful she is! It seemed to

me that she looked lovelier than ever. It seemed to me there was a new suggestion of the voluptuous in her beauty, as though the softer airs of the Coast climate had imparted a new tone to her whole being: certainly not sensual, hardly even sensuous, but warmer, richer, more paganly womanish—more alluring.

She had planned to be gone only a month—just to "run out" to the Coast for the housewarming and back. She had been away six weeks, and every week had been a year to me. No wonder I was glad to see her—Lord, how tame the words sound. Glad? I was wild with joy. Now at last the long wait was ended, she had come back to me, back where she belongs, back to the true wife's place beside her husband. I felt a little stab of pain because she did not seem quite as exuberantly happy to be back as I had supposed she would, but she has so many interests, so many friends, so many attachments to different places, that she could hardly be expected to feel just as I did.

We went straight to the hotel where I had engaged rooms, and it was a real joy to be able to register for "Mr. and Mrs. Chester Clarke."

Feb. 18—Louise gave me a shock today. We were talking about the Coast. She told about her last night there. Two weeks before the date she had been urged to stay for the Forty-Niner's Ball, one of the most brilliant events of the season. She had pleaded her anxiety to return East, on account of Ernest, but the people would admit no excuses, and she had at last yielded to their persuasions. Did she yield, I wonder, with any very great reluctance? She could hardly be expected to realize how much each day—each hour—of added waiting meant to me. A person with so glorious a self as hers has more right than the rest of us have to be selfish! I did not say anything to her, but it did—and it does—seem most strange to me that she should have decided on this postponement without telling me just what was the reason for it. I do not think she meant, really, to tell me about it even now, but it slipped out in the course of our conversation. It almost seems as though there had been something to conceal, though I am absolutely certain that there is nothing underhanded about it. Perhaps she was a little bit ashamed of herself for having made me wait beyond the appointed time!

I imagine this Forty-Niners' Ball is a pretty gay affair. It seemed to me as she described it that she might be toning down the colors a little. I don't know — all I can say is that it left me feeling uncomfortable, without my being able to give any reason at all for that feeling.

The thing that did surprise me was the fact that she told me she had worn one of the gowns that she had had made for her trousseau.

"Why, Louise," I said, "I thought you were not to wear those gowns till after our public wedding!"

"Oh," she said, rather carelessly, I thought, "I did not intend to do so, but it is such a beautiful thing, and I wanted to make my very finest appearance at this ball — it is one of the greatest events of the year out there, and the women are dressed beautifully. There was n't time to have anything new made, and this gown was just the thing. I made a hit. It was very much admired. And, you know, the styles change so fast that by the time we are ready for our real wedding it would be quite out of fashion. I shall have something new for that occasion."

This was a facer for me! I had always

supposed a woman's trousseau was — well, shall I say almost a part of the wedding itself. It may be that this is only a clumsy tradition invented for women by men, and not their own idea at all.

It seemed to me as if she had destroyed a beautiful symbol — and we cannot destroy symbols without taking some of the bloom off the things they stand for. I am not sentimental, but perhaps for that very reason such things, when they do mean something to me, mean even more than they would to a person who habitually makes more of the small things.

I must have shown that I was puzzled, perhaps I looked even grieved or offended, for she laughed and said: "Now, you foolish man! Don't look like that — I shall have a new gown made, just as lovely as that one was."

But I could not help thinking that her laugh was — oh, just the least bit — strained, as if she had not herself felt exactly easy over it. Very likely this was pure imagination. At any rate, the incident made it clear to me that I am very, very far from comprehending the woman way of looking at things.

Feb. 20. One of those incidents happened today which it is not easy for me to understand. . . .

Here Clarke laid down the diary. He had no further need of the book to refresh his memory. He could picture the scene in his mind's eye and hear the words as distinctly as though they were again being uttered.

Alice was to take part in a school play. Her special invitation to him to be present and see her make her début had been warmly seconded by her mother, so he had planned a day with them.

As he was in the act of passing the open window of her apartment, he overheard a voice, which he at once recognized as Louise's, saying:

"A man could not pay a woman a higher compliment than to ask her to be his wife. I am very much honored."

Clarke could endure no more. Unpleasant as it was to intrude, he felt that he could not retreat, so he gave the bell a vigorous pull. After what seemed to him a long delay, the door opened and a gentleman stepped briskly into the hall. He passed Clarke without a glance and walked out of the building.

Louise appeared a moment later. She met him with wonderful self-possession.

"Why, Chester!" she cried, kissing him, "I am glad that you came just as you did. You have relieved me of a most embarrassing situation.

"Who do you suppose that was and what do you suppose he was doing here?

"Well, that was Doctor Belknap of San Francisco and he was making me an offer of marriage."

"Yes, I inferred so from the remark I overheard you make as I reached your door."

"Oh, you overheard our conversation. Then you perfectly understand that I did not encourage him to make it. In fact I was quite surprised to see him here. Sit down and I will tell you about it.

"You will remember Alice was sick while I was in San Francisco. I preferred to care for her myself. I called in Dr. Belknap—he practices in a very exclusive set only, is no end rich and swagger and all that sort of thing—well, he came a number of times in the evening and made rather long visits. I didn't think anything of that. Then I called him in after midnight once or twice. Of course he saw me in my *robe de chambre*

—and—and—well, I thought he was a little affectionate and held my hand rather long while he was showing me how to drop medicine—that, I think, was all—oh, no—the next morning as I was leaving for the East, he was at the train to see me off, and brought a gorgeous bunch of flowers with his compliments. And here he is today to tell me that he simply cannot live without me. Now you have the whole story."

"Very well, dear, let's forget it," said Clarke.

"But I do think it is the strangest thing how you men misunderstand a woman."

The weeks between this rather remarkable incident and the lonely anniversary which had set Clarke's thoughts on the backward track had been quite uneventful. But it was impossible not to see that there had been a change in his relations with Louise. It was, of course, only temporary and superficial; but it was just alarming enough to make him more resolved than ever that their public and official wedding should be celebrated just as soon as that miserable business of the will could be settled. And he resolved that the settlement must be hastened. By way of hastening it, he sat down

at his desk and wrote a letter to Mr. Malsby, in which he urged him to do anything he could to get things moving. "I tell you, sir," he wrote, "this thing cannot go on this way. It is going to make trouble for us if it is not disposed of soon."

CHAPTER IV

ON the first day of April Louise received a telegram from her father from Topeka: "Come at once. Ready for round up."

On the second day of April Louise left, well pleased to be moving again in the direction of her newly beloved California.

"Ready for round up": that meant that the will was about to be signed. One step, and a good long one, in the right direction —toward the settling of this most difficult part of his problem, for Clarke.

He could picture in his mind the scene: he had, when in Topeka, made one call at the old Willoughby house. Mr. Willoughby had been the possessor of a very distinguished collection of John Brown papers, and Mr. Malsby had contrived to give Clarke a view of them. He had not seen the old lady, but Sharp was there, and Clarke could imagine what figure he would cut at the conference. The house itself had engaged his interest.

The parlors and sitting room opened from either side of a broad hall. Heavy curtains of some dark colored material were at the windows, hanging from brass-tipped wooden rods and gathered in at the sides with thick, tasselled cords. There were no rugs; the floor was covered, from baseboard to baseboard, with brussels carpet of a huge flowered pattern. The furniture was of heavy black walnut—a ponderous center table; high backed chairs, upholstered in an ornate blue brocade; a what-not, carrying a collection of "curios." And, shades of bygone discomforts, in the sitting room he discovered a horsehair sofa; a design of wax flowers covered by a glass bell, and, prominently placed on the center table, a bulky, massively bound "family" Bible.

A heavy cornice and frieze brought ceiling and walls together. Imposingly dull pictures hung in showy, gilded frames. The companion crayon portraits of an elderly man and woman of imposing appearance Clarke correctly supposed to represent Father and Mother Willoughby. Could that large carved music box on its stand in the corner possibly play a sentimental tune from "Robert le Diable," or such a dance as

might animate those two stiff-kneed marble figures flanking the folding doors? There they stood, giving mute testimony of some long-since visit of the elder Willoughbys to those centers of Europe where a certain sort of American craving, a flattering though misdirected ambition to patronize Art, was formerly gratified with a discernment more artistic than these stiff reminders of other days. Everywhere was evidence that the house had been furnished quite "regardless of expense"—no doubt, when the Willoughbys and the Willoughby fortune alike were young. Father and Mother Willoughby had apparently indulged then, but never since, in a revel of up-to-dateness.

The house stood well back from the street, and the whole place was encompassed by a highly ornamental iron fence. In the mathematically exact center of the lawn on one side of the walk an iron hound stood patiently, ignoring and ignored by the lofty antlered iron stag in the mathematically exact center of the lawn on the other side. Metallically constant, metallically indifferent, they gave the place an air of ironclad respectability. The flower beds were laid out in Euclidean patterns, the shrubs were

pruned into the most unnatural forms the mind of man could devise. The house had three stories, with a mansard roof, and was flanked by towers ornamented with iron work.

Clarke could visualize easily and vividly the meeting of the parties interested in the making of the will. It would be a rather sombre affair. There would be the old lady, a silent and somewhat sinister presence. There would be the sons and daughters, fearful and envious. There would be Sharp, greedy and shrewd, playing the deep game. There would be the Judge, representing the stern majesty of the law, and there would be Malsby, alert and aggressive, defending the interests of his grandchildren. And Louise—what a contrast she would make to these others!

With this picture clearly fixed in his mind, he read easily between the lines of this letter, which he received from Mr. Malsby, on April 9:

"TOPEKA, KANSAS, April 6.

"DEAR CHESTER:—

"You doubtless heard from Louise that I wired her on the first to come out here to

the round up, so it will be no news to you that we are all here in Kansas.

"In order to relieve your mind of any apprehension at the start, let me say that I have good news — damned good, too. We have roped and branded the steer, and the will is executed to our satisfaction. Let me tell you about it.

"As you know, I have been watching for an opening to land on Sharp. Well, it came last fall, sooner than I had expected, and I hit out from the shoulder. I didn't let you in on it then, because I wasn't sure that it would come to anything. He put an ad in the paper for an assistant bookkeeper, and I immediately wired a New York detective agency to send me their best man. He came, a fellow named Smiley, got his instructions from me, and applied for the job. After looking him over, he proved to be just the man Sharp wanted — good at figures, but a cringing sort of a galoot in other ways.

"Sharp set him to work. After he had got the run of the place, he began at odd times to look over the old accounts. He followed up a good many blind trails before he struck anything that proved interesting — but he got there at last. He found on one

of the stubs of a check book, on a Kansas City bank where the concern kept most of its funds, a check made payable to Father Willoughby for $50,000. This was drawn a few days before the old man died. There was nothing to arouse suspicion except the size of the check.

"Smiley wondered, and set about finding out what the old man had done with so large a sum. He located the check, after some hunt, and found that it had been endorsed in blank and paid over the counter. As Father Willoughby had n't been out of the house for a month before he died, it was clear that he could n't have cashed it in.

"There was nothing in the books to show that the funds had been used subsequently in the business. At this stage of the investigation I went to Topeka — that was two weeks ago — and took a hand in it. None of the family knew anything about the matter.

"Of two handwriting experts, one gave it as his opinion that the endorsement was genuine; the other was sure that it was a forgery — so much for that. The bank officials had no distinct recollection of paying it, but were all agreed that they would

not have paid so large a sum to any one but Sharp without confirmation. He was frequently in Kansas City on business for the Works, and it was a common occurrence for him to present similar checks for collection —though not usually for anything like so large a sum. It was evident that Sharp had got the money, but we could n't learn anything more.

"I concluded to put him through a third degree. I invited him around one evening and put it up to him. I gave him to understand that I knew just what he did with the money, and I preached him a little sermon on the Commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal.' I might say that I expounded the Scriptures to him, as one having authority, not as the scribe. Being a church member in good and regular standing, he showed the greatest interest in all that I said. Then I read him an extract from the Penal Code of the State of Kansas setting forth in unmistakable terms the penalty in such cases made and provided. This also seemed to impress him deeply. In fact he asked if I would object to opening a window and letting in a little air.

"When I got through, I gave him his

choice, either to spend the night in jail or to coöperate with me in securing the execution of Mother Willoughby's will upon the understanding that if he made the latter choice I would keep his little secret. He was to insist, however, that his wife receive, under the terms of the will, fifty thousand dollars less than her distributive share of the estate on account of the debt of gratitude which he owed Father Willoughby. I told him that I would let him explain that in his own way. I made it clear that if he failed to secure this provision in the will, he and I would n't be able to do business.

"To make a long story short, the clan gathered, and the will was duly executed yesterday, and is now lodged in the office of the Probate Court for this county.

"You would have thought it well worth the price of a trip out here and back to have heard Sharp's explanation of the reason why his wife should discount that fifty thousand.

"Father Willoughby had been more than a father to him, he said; had helped him invest his savings, which investments had been very profitable, and shortly before he died had made him a munificent gift in token of his esteem, and appreciation of his faithful

services. In recognition of all this, his wife joined him in insisting that they should receive fifty thousand dollars less than her proportionate share of the estate — it would be a comparatively small discount anyway; they would have more than enough.

"Sharp had already, as of course you understand, made his position clear to Mother Willoughby, who, no doubt, had resolved to make it up to 'dear John' some other way, but to Louise and the other Willoughbys sitting about it was so to speak first-hand information. You should have seen their faces — they were all bowled over — had n't a word to say — and they have n't recovered yet.

"As we left the house, Judge Pike said to me, 'Malsby, what 's the answer?' and I replied, 'There is n't any, Judge.'

"So now, my boy, the winter of your discontent is about to be changed to glorious summer, as Mark Twain or some other literary fellow has put it, and I am glad of it.

"Very truly yours,

"Robert Malsby.

"P.S. Louise and I leave for San Francisco tonight."

CHAPTER V

THAT letter from Mr. Malsby was like a great eraser sweeping over the blackboard on which Chester Clarke had been writing the record of his life, the hand of fate holding his fingers, but the inscription was not at all what he would have made it had his auctorial will been subject to no such editorial control. Now the board had been swept clean, the writing was to begin anew, and he had high visions of what was to be inscribed.

Happier than he had been for weeks, he dashed off a note to Louise:

"BOSTON, April 9, 19—.

"MY BELOVED ONE:—

"I am just in receipt of your father's long and all important letter. I cannot tell you how I have looked forward to this day—what it means to me. Thank God that this long wait is over at last! I only hope that I have lived up to all that you expected of me for your sake and that of the children—that

their interests are secured and that they will in due time come into their own.

"And now it is our turn! Write me as soon as you are able to do so the date on which you will announce our engagement in order that it may appear simultaneously in the Boston and California papers — also how long do you think it will take to arrange the wedding?

"Personally I am not at all particular about a grand celebration, and especially if it entails further delay; but that is for you to determine, and I suppose your dear Dad will want to do us proud.

"I shall need just notice enough to enable me to make the necessary arrangements to be absent from my office for two or three weeks, for I suppose we will return East by easy stages — say a run to the National Park, then to Niagara Falls, or if the season is too early for these places, we could come home by the Southern route, stopping off at San Antonio and New Orleans. Are you a good sailor? We could take a steamer from New Orleans to New York. It 's a wonderful voyage. The steamers are first class. We 'll have the time of our lives!

"You should have seen me when I got

your father's letter. I was dictating to my stenographer—a very proper young lady. I said, 'Can you dance?' I didn't wait for her answer. I grabbed her and with a 'waltz me round again, Willie,' I sailed in. Well, I won't tell you what she said but I am afraid I've lost caste with the office force. I just slipped a cog, that was all; but can you blame me?

"Kiss little Alice for me. Keep a few for yourself and believe me

"Your devoted,

"CHESTER."

And this was the reply:

"MY DEAR CHESTER:—

"We reached home Thursday night. The trip was uneventful. On the train father made the acquaintance of a gentleman from Berkeley who was very polite to us. Each morning there was a beautiful bunch of flowers at my breakfast plate. No offer of marriage, however, as yet.

"We have had a host of callers. The Senator came to pay his compliments the first afternoon and to tell us how much he had missed us. He stayed to dinner and after that we had the piano moved out onto

the veranda. While he and Alice made themselves cosy on a lounge, I improvised to them in the moonlight.

"I think after reading your letter that you must indeed have 'slipped a cog,' as you put it. Now I hope that you won't be too much disappointed, but, dear boy, don't you see that you have lost your sense of the eternal fitness of things?

"If there was n't anything to prevent, I could n't get ready for our wedding in a day. There are a lot of things that a woman has to do when she is going to be married of which you men know nothing and there are matters out here to be arranged.

"But putting them all aside, there is Mother Willoughby still to be considered. It would n't do at all for us to marry the day after that will was signed! It would be such a *faux pas*, so transparent. It might undo all that we have thus far accomplished.

"She would know at once that we had been concealing our relations from her against that event, that I had been deceiving her for who shall say how long, and she would never forgive me. Could you blame her? She is a very shrewd old lady — very clever, and I might say very vindictive once

she is roused. You see in a day, with the stroke of a pen, she can cut the children off. It is still in her power to give her property away in her lifetime; or a codicil to her will, as you perfectly well know, would deprive them of their father's share.

"The other Willoughbys would all profit by just that much, and there is n't one of them that would n't be glad of it. You see they were willing to make common cause with father against the common enemy, Sharp. Now that they have got what they wanted out of Sharp and their mother, they would n't hesitate to combine with him to make off with Ernest's and Alice's share.

"They have a very good argument to advance to Mother Willoughby — my children will come into the property their father left and will also inherit the whole of my father's estate some day — that alone is ample — all that is good for them.

"In my last talks with Mother Willoughby at Topeka she hinted at all this and gave me to understand that the bequest to the children in her will was a sort of shrine to their father's memory where we three were to go every day to worship. It follows, of course, that if we failed to place our daily

libations on the altar, the Goddess would grow angry and withhold her blessing.

"No, my dear, you will have to possess yourself in patience a while longer. I think it was Milton who said, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.' You have been such a patient waiter; and I always know that I can ask anything of you, anything; that you will make any sacrifice for my sake — because you love me.

"We must let time enough pass before Mrs. Willoughby hears of you so that she may infer that you came into my life after the execution of the will — that our relations are not in any way related to that event.

"Then you must give me time to get her reconciled to the idea of my marrying again, to win her over as I did the children. That means four or five months at least. If you really insist upon my naming the day, I will fix upon September fifteenth. That is my father's birthday. He would be so pleased to have us honor his birthday by making it our wedding day — don't you see, the celebration could be made a joint affair, and we do owe so much to dear father, who brought about this whole settlement.

"So cheer up; the intervening time need not hang so heavily on your hands. I shall be coming East in June to fetch the children home and you can spend your summer vacation, just as much time as you can afford to be away, with us here in California. We can take the children and go off into the mountains, camping out — it would be ideal. Before you were aware of it the summer would be gone.

"Now haven't I outlined a very sensible plan? I am quite sure that you will agree that I have when you recover from your first sense of disappointment.

"Poor dear father is not well and we had hardly moved into the house before mother began to nag him. In some way I always seem to be involved in their quarrels. This time it was about father's sanctum.

"I had arranged the furniture and placed the couch as I thought to the best advantage where he could get the view when he was lying down, but mother thought that my arrangement broke up the symmetry of the room, which is another way of expressing what I call primness, and so it goes.

"With much love,

"LOUISE."

When Clarke received this letter, as was to be expected, he was depressed, and groaned aloud, "How long, O Lord, how long!" He sat very still for an hour, his face buried in his hands, thinking it all out.

For more than a year now he had held himself together. He had adapted his own ideas and movements to the demands made upon him. He had played the game. He had done it admitting that the reasons for the course of action demanded of him had been consistent and rational, but he had done so upon the understanding that when the Willoughby will should finally be signed that was to be the end of it.

He had never thought of this new phase of the situation; it had never been even hinted before. Now he was asked to continue for five months longer what seemed to him in a sense a farce. It was really asking too much, but the reasons advanced were as rational and potent as those offered for the original arrangement; and Clarke's mind was a logical one.

What other course was there to pursue? He could not take advantage of the absolute mastery of the situation which his relations with Louise gave him to compel her to any

other course. His sense of chivalry would n't admit of that, and besides, even to suggest such a thing would be to destroy her love for him. She was too imperious to be coerced — too devoted to what she regarded as her children's interests to be reasoned with.

Therefore Clarke decided once more to continue playing the game.

CHAPTER VI

THE structure of Chester Clarke's happiness had been reared with startling swiftness. He had thought it would last as long as life. Now he began to have moments of vague but none the less distressing doubt as to the merit of the architecture. Had he been building castles in the air? Were they to vanish on the breath of the wind of adverse fate? No; at least not without an obstinate endeavor on his part to forestall such a catastrophe.

Letters from the West came more and more infrequently, and each was less richly loaded with words of endearment, less fragrant with the shared spirit of his hope. It was crushing to receive a letter — if it could be called a letter — like this: "Dear — I can only write a line, as I am going with a party of friends to San Bardou. We expect to have a jolly evening of it, and as it is nearly time to start, I shall have to ask you to read between the lines. Louise." Read between the lines — ah, if he could only keep from doing that very thing! There were few lines,

but there was room between them for so much, so very much, that he did not want to read! People who read between the lines of letters are apt to read more than they should, but, even allowing a proper discount for this, Clarke could not find it in his heart to rejoice over such a letter. He was hurt. Was all the joy in life, so nearly attained, thus to slip away, eluding his eager grasp, and leave him, like a drowning man, clutching with impotent hands at empty air?

Early in June, Louise wrote she was about to leave for the East, to spend the rest of the month with the children. At the end of the school year she was to take them home with her. He wired immediately, hoping to catch her before she started; but a telegram came from Mr. Malsby, saying: "Your wire missed Louise by two hours. Try at other end."

He wrote a letter, addressed to her at the up-State town where she had her apartment when with the children. He expressed his joy at the prospect of seeing her again so soon. "Write me when and where to meet you in New York," he said; "and name the earliest possible day. I 'm starving for another sight of you."

Immediately came a telegram: "Have had message, Father sick. Am leaving for San Francisco tomorrow. Too bad."

"Too bad." Clarke studied himself sick over that telegram.

In her next letter she said: "No doubt you were surprised when I hurried home without seeing you. But you will perfectly understand! Father seems much better, now that we are all here. His illness is not at all alarming, but of course I cannot do as much going about as formerly. I shall lead a very quiet, domestic life till he is better."

"'Surprised?' 'Understand?' I wish to God I could understand either more, or less, perfectly!"

But the end was not yet. In the next letter she wrote:

"The vacation plan will have to be changed. Mother Willoughby has just written that she will visit us out here, and says she will be with us July 15. Isn't it strange that she should have selected the exact date on which you had expected to arrive?

"Of course, you will see that it would hardly do for you to come when she is here. We could not take our trip to the moun-

tains, as I shall be obliged to devote all of my time to her. We shall simply have to postpone your visit. I know that you will be patient, and it is a great comfort to have this assurance. I believe you literally when you say that you put my happiness before your own, and so I can call upon you for this small sacrifice without fear of your being too much put out with the circumstances which, as I am sure you will see, make it absolutely necessary.

"With regret, I am, as ever,

"Yours,

"LOUISE."

"'Patient?' Yes—as patient as a man can very well be under such circumstances."

During these weeks Clarke lived in constant apprehension. He was unhappy all day, and restless all night. He could not be alone in comfort. He tried a trip down on the Cape; but there was no satisfaction in it for him. So evening after evening he went to the club, dined alone, or with a friend or two, and afterward wandered aimlessly through the house. Gradually he fell into the habit of settling down for the evening in the reading room.

Once he picked up a copy of a San Francisco weekly, the *Golden Gate*. It lay on a table, open at the page of "society notes." He ran his eye carelessly down the columns, but found nothing of interest; and by ten o'clock he was on his way home.

Night after night he gravitated to that reading room. Now and again a malignant fate seemed to lay under his questing hand that phosphorous sheet, the *Golden Gate*.

He despised the life reflected in its pages. A shallow life. A life that sparkled only because it had no stability. A life that chose to forget the past, that took no heed of the future, that lived only for the joy of the present moment: like a worm eating its way to the heart of a rose.

At first he did not think of it as distinctly a San Francisco paper, it was simply a mirror held up to a certain kind of living practiced by a group of people everywhere, in every city. But gradually it began to claim a place as a San Francisco message; and all of a sudden the fact leaped to recognition that these blatantly celebrated personages of the gay world were fellow townspeople of his Louise; that she was making her great success among them. That gave

them a new interest, and a certain claim upon his consideration. They couldn't be, after all, quite such a bad lot — quite so worthless — as he had been making them out. Then it dawned upon him that if her social triumphs were as pronounced as reported, of necessity this paper would make mention of them. With that thought in mind he began to run it over, then to read it, divided between a sort of fascination that it had for him and a sense of shame at resorting to such a method of possibly obtaining information as to her movements.

One evening Clarke, who had been skimming the items carelessly, suddenly sat up straight in his chair. His eyes were fixed upon a paragraph that stood out as though it had been printed in red ink.

"Senator Hooper gave a gay party Tuesday night, at the Poodle Dog. His protégée, the charming widow from somewhere to the East of us, Mrs. Walter Willoughby, made the big hit of the occasion. It is whispered — "

The words burned in Chester Clarke's mind. Damn these whispering people! What right had they to whisper about his wife!

From that memorable evening Clarke ceased to dodge the *Golden Gate* as he had been doing. He yielded to its spell and week after week sought it out and read paragraphs like this:

"The Hawaiian party last night broke all records for frolics in this frolicsome Coast. Mrs. W. W., the heartbreaking widow from the Sunflower State, again carried off the laurels. A distinguished former statesman of national reputation, whom we need not name, scored another triumph. His protégée, the lovely—" and so on, till Clarke could hardly read the dancing letters for mingled sorrow and anger. The wretched sheet had him in its grip. It tortured him—more when he did not see it than when he had it in his hand. What would it say next? No use telling himself it really had said nothing, as yet. The damnable insinuation of its clever word juggling tormented him. Not that it incriminated Louise! She was its victim. But the insouciant deviltry of it, the libel against mankind, the cynical reliance upon verbal ambiguity, the defiance of that decency which is not explicated in penal codes!

And then a date caught his attention.

He copied out an item, and, hurrying back to his rooms, feverishly turned over his precious file of letters from Louise. Finding the letter he sought, he sat staring at it. The date it bore and the statement it contained—"I missed the nicest party last night, staying at home to nurse Father"—were hopelessly belied by the record in the *Golden Gate*. Had she misstated the fact? Had the paper misprinted? Why, in the Devil's name, should she misrepresent? How could the paper err in so routine a matter of its business? No need to follow Clarke's mind in its tortuous way to the cold conclusion that it was no concern of his, that this was not a nettle he need grasp, or could gain by grasping. "Trust—and be true!" He would live up to the motto, whatever happened.

Finally the wretched business came to a climax. One evening, seeking his paper, he found it being passed from hand to hand. The two or three men were amusing themselves over a picture.

"The female form at its divinest," said one.

"Female form grotesque," growled a misogynist. "It's only the draperies that

save it. A few dry goods work wonders," added the cynic.

"Well," said another man, "I'm hanged if I believe the real Juno had anything on this one!"

"Neither of 'em had much on," said the cynic.

Clarke tiptoed out of the room.

Half an hour later, when the group had dispersed and the reading room had settled down once more to its normal calm, he returned. He picked up the *Golden Gate,* and looked at the picture.

Of course—it was Louise. She was Juno—a bold, dark, lovely goddess.

An article accompanied the picture, linking with hers the Senator's name. The writer insinuated the existence of a compact; the man's wealth and power, the woman's beauty—and power. *Quid pro quo.* There was not a suggestion of anything "immoral." She was the old man's toy; and he was her very useful patron, her "promoter."

It was almost farcical. Tragedy, in real life, is.

Clarke went home and wrote a long letter to Louise. He dragged his weary body to bed; lay a long while thinking, then got up

and destroyed the letter. He would write again in the morning, when he could think better, and express himself more clearly and calmly.

But in the morning came a letter from Louise that changed the world for him.

CHAPTER VII

LOUISE wrote:

"SAN FRANCISCO, July —, 19—.

"MY DEAR LOVE:—

"I haven't slept any for three nights. Last night I cried all the night long. I cannot endure it any longer. I must write and ask you to let me go.

"I love you just as much as I ever did. I have always loved you. I shall always love you, but it is never going to be possible for me to do what you wish, to carry out the plans that we have made; there are too many obstacles in the way. I could never do it and be happy. If I tried, I should only ruin your life and mine and make others who are dependent upon me unhappy. I could never make you a good wife. I am very much out of health. I am all broken down nervously.

"Then there are the children. They have never been reconciled to the idea of my marrying you. If they had been, I should

have married you long ago. I have tried — oh, how hard I have tried — to win Ernest but he is impossible; he says that he won't live in the house with us, that it is n't doing right by his dead father, that I as good as promised him on his deathbed that I would not marry again, that I had always said I would not marry unless he (Ernest) approved.

"The children have become attached to this place, they are happy here, they don't want to go away, they have made friends here, they say they won't come East to live.

"Then there is my father — my poor father. He is feeble, so broken, and he clings to me. He will go on suffering rather than ask mother to do anything for him. How could I desert him? It would be cruel. Oh, how hard I have tried to find a way out! I have prayed and prayed for help.

"Now I must appeal to you — you, my love; you must help me, you must save me. You have said you loved me as no man ever loved a woman, that you would do anything for my sake, would make any sacrifice. Have n't you said so a hundred times, 'any sacrifice'? I think you once said 'even to life itself.' This is n't quite so bad as that,

is it? I never thought that I should put you to the test, that I should ask you to give me up, but it has come to that—there is no other way.

"Nobody knows of our true relations except old Mrs. Giese, and she doesn't have to be considered. She need never see you and me again, and there is no one to whom she would ever mention us. Of course if it were worth the trouble I could disabuse her mind of any ideas that might have lodged there. She would do anything, or think anything for me. She is old and feeble; she will soon be gone and the secret she has been keeping for us will die with her.

"Now, dear, I do not mean to love you less; I never could if I should try. I never want to, and I never want you to love me less. I only want you because you do love me enough, because you are big enough and strong enough to make the sacrifice, to consent to cancelling all our promises and plans. Tell me that you will. Oh, how I shall love you for it, and we shall be to one another just as we always have been! You will come out to see us sometimes, and when I am East I can let you know.

"God bless you, my beloved! Though my

heart aches to breaking, it still says I love you! I love you!! I love you!!!

"LOUISE."

Clarke was in his private office alone when he received this crushing blow. The contents of all letters during the last month, together with the excerpts of her activities which he had read at his Club from the *Golden Gate,* her failure to meet him when East, had stirred him to the depths of his soul, and filled him with ominous forebodings, but he had not expected anything quite so appalling as this. A certain numbness of his faculties came over him. He felt faint and dizzy. He could hear the click, click of the typewriter in the main office, he could see upon his desk the brief which he had been working upon when the letter was handed in, but he was powerless to concentrate his thoughts or control his faculties.

At length with a masterly effort he roused himself, took his hat and coat and descended to the street. He made his way up Court Street to Tremont and along that thoroughfare. The usual crowds were thronging the sidewalk and the Mall, but he recognized no one. Presently he found himself opposite

the Touraine. It was here that he had been in the habit of coming for years for his haircut. "Joe" had a wonderfully sympathetic touch and in all these years he had come to esteem him as a friend. He needed a friend now, — not one of his own set, but a man of elemental parts. Besides, he was conscious of a heavy throbbing in his head; and so he found his way to the barbershop and "Joe's" chair.

"You are not looking well, Mr. Clarke," said Joe, a kindly concern in his voice. "What can I do for you?"

"Give my head a good rubbing; I have a headache, I think."

That was all he remembered until he found himself coming out of an unconscious state, and recognized Joe bathing his face with alcohol and holding a bottle to his nose.

"What has happened?" he inquired, with a surprised expression.

"You fainted," Joe said. "I saw that you were not yourself today the moment you came in."

Under Joe's ministrations he was gradually brought around and after a time left the hotel with his mental faculties once more restored.

One after another the facts and circumstances which would have led a more suspicious man, or one possessing less faith, to conclude that this letter, this evident determination to repudiate her marriage contract, was what might have been expected, marshalled themselves in grim array. But Chester Clarke was unconvinced.

His theory of life had been to trust people, to believe every man innocent until he had been proved guilty. Better, he had said, to be deceived and betrayed now and then, than to go through this world suspecting everybody and standing on guard against mankind.

He had given his all into this woman's keeping. He would never break faith with her, believing that she was equally true to him and that nothing short of death itself could separate them.

Her letter, he assured himself, must have been written under some aberration of mind or temporary discouragement. She would recover from that and in another mood would retract these words and beg his pardon for having distressed him. He would get such a letter by an early mail, and so reasoning, he sent her a speedy reply:

"BOSTON, July —, 19—.

"MY DEAR LOVE:—

"I received your letter of the 12th. Of course you do not mean what you have written. My sweetheart is tired, ill, depressed, something has gone wrong with her. Before this letter has reached her she will be her old self again — and she will write me one of the sweetest letters in the world.

"I am very much worried about you because I think you have been carrying too much of a load. That matter of the will has worn on you — perhaps this is the reaction. Now I have good broad shoulders and you are to unload all of your troubles onto me; that is what a husband is for. I am quite sure that Ernest would not stand in the way of your happiness if he fully realized the gravity of such an attitude. When we are once settled in Boston and he has taken on new interests — has entered a school preparatory for college — he will see things from an entirely different point of view; and what better place is there than Boston in which to have a girl grow up?

"As a last resort, assuming that there were no other solution, I should be willing to pull up stakes here and settle in San

Francisco. It would have to be with the understanding, however, that I was to pursue the same course of life there as here. I should open an office and begin the practice of law over again. I am too much wedded to my profession and work to be contented with an idle existence. With my New England training, I could n't brook anything less.

"Have a stout heart, my Beloved. We will find a way or make one.

"Ever your devoted,

"CHESTER."

Men are apt to think that the things they desire will really come to pass. For ten days Chester Clarke sought out every mail for the letter that never came. The reply which his appeal did receive ran as follows:

"SAN FRANCISCO, July —, 19—.

"MY DEAR CHESTER: —

"How difficult it seems for you to understand me! How hard you make it for me! I have tried to have you realize that I cannot carry out our plans, and I have appealed to the great love you professed for me as an assurance of your assent to my determination. You have failed me!

"It is useless for us to enter into a controversy over the matter. Do let us part at least as friends if we cannot as lovers. I wish you all the happiness that can possibly come to one in this world. You are free. Some day you will find a woman who will take my place in your affections. I shall never marry. Do not think that you alone are to suffer. I would spare you if I could.

"Goodbye.

"LOUISE."

CHAPTER VIII

"YOU have failed me!" It would be of no avail to parley any further; Chester Clarke realized that. The temple of his hopes had fallen, burying him beneath its ruins, but he had dug himself out and now sat looking about.

There was no human eye to cast a glance of pity, no human hand extended to help him rise, no human tongue to speak a word of counsel. He was alone — alone to contemplate the ruins, to work out his own salvation; and not his alone but that of the woman who sought to throw him over.

It was a simple matter to interpret the situation. Louise had loved him; she had loved him to the full capacity of her being to love any one man. When she had met him she was hungry for just such an affection as he had to offer. As a corollary to that affection stood all the inducements of a life in a cultured city and in the social set in which Clarke moved. In comparison with the condition of her previous mar-

ried life in Topeka, nothing could be more desirable.

There was no obstacle to this end that was not temporary and that could not be overcome. Had her parents remained in Kansas all would have been well. The love of admiration, praise, and social recognition which was both inherent in her nature and essential to her happiness, might have been gratified in Boston within reasonable bounds. But her experiences in California, the sensuous character of the climate and life, the adulation with which she had been received, the luxury of the new house, had entered into her veins and like a prairie fire had swept all before it.

Under the influence of this spell she now proposed to Clarke to treat their secret and informal marriage as if it had never been, and she had relied upon Clarke's great love for her and upon his sense of chivalry, as she interpreted chivalry, to keep the secret and permit her to pursue the alluring tenor of her ways. And he had told her he would make *any* sacrifice for her!

What duty did he owe her? This was the question which his New England conscience put to him. This was the question that cost

him several days and nights of agony and doubt, and that caused him at last to write:

"My dear Louise:—

"I received your ultimatum of July—and I have a counter statement to submit.

"I have thus far appealed to your affections and to the higher sentiments of your nature, as to what I felt certain would be the sure guides to your conduct, but I seem to have appealed in vain.

"It is with extreme reluctance and only as a last resort that I am now forced to consider our relations from a different standpoint. Would to God that you had not forced me to it! You propose to ignore our marriage relations, and you ask me to do the same. I reply that that is impossible. A common law marriage is just as binding—yes, more binding, more sacred, than a public one, and for the reason that it depends for its sanctity upon the honor and good faith of those who enter into it.

"Neither you nor I can annul it. It has passed beyond our control into the jurisdiction of the law. I could n't consent to your repudiating it even if I were disposed to do so, which I am not. I shall never lend

myself to such a suggestion, no matter what the results. You must acknowledge our union or by some method I shall promulgate it.

"I cannot compel you to live with me, nor do I wish to against your desire. I should love to have you, if you come willingly. You may, at some future day if you wish, bring proceedings in court to annul our marriage. That is the only way that is open to you. I shall give you an opportunity to reconsider your decision, and to write me to that effect. If I do not hear from you within two weeks, I shall feel at liberty to adopt such a course of action as my judgment dictates. In the meantime, I remain ready to accept any plan that is in consonance with this letter.

"There is no bitterness in my heart, only sorrow that our beautiful bark should be so near the rocks.

"May I suggest that you consult your father and mother and any other trusted counselor available.

"Yours devotedly,

"CHESTER."

This precipitated an exchange of letters and telegrams in the following order:

"San Francisco, July —, 19—.

"Chester Clarke, Esq.

"State Street, Boston.

"I suppose you think to compel me either to announce our ceremony in New York as our marriage or go through a public celebration out here.

"And to what purpose? Is it simply to confirm an idea of your own, or is it deliberately to ruin my life and make my children wretched? I couldn't drag them East and I don't see where you fit in out here—certainly not in this house.

"Considering that you are altogether to blame, responsible for the existing conditions, I should think that you would be just a little ashamed to take advantage of them to coerce me. My conscience is perfectly clear in this matter and I am praying and putting my trust in God. He will not forsake me.

"I am not decided, as yet, whether I shall show your letter to my father and mother, or tell you to go ahead and do your worst. In whatever I do I shall be guided by the children's best interests—and mine.

"L."

"San Francisco, July —, 19—.

"Chester Clarke, Esq.

"State Street, Boston.

"Delay taking any action. I am replying to your last letter to Louise.

"Hannah Malsby."

"San Francisco, July —, 19—.

"Chester Clarke, Esq.

"State Street, Boston.

"Sir:—

"How could you write such a letter to my daughter as you have — you who profess to be a Boston gentleman? What has she done to you that you should be so cruel to her? I shouldn't suppose that any man would want to force a woman to live with him against her will. And how could you have the heart to attempt to blacken her character? You will not succeed in it. She has never done you any harm. You have brought nothing but misery into this family. My husband is ill and Louise has been made prostrate by this blow.

"Hannah Malsby."

"Boston, July —, 19—.

"Dear Mrs. Malsby:—

"Your letter has been received.

"I am not attempting to sully your daughter's character, I am attempting to save it. She will not deny the relations existing between us which my letter to her discloses. It would be useless to do so. No one could regret more than I do that any unhappiness should be brought upon you and Mr. Malsby.

"My decision is unalterable.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CHESTER CLARKE."

"SAN FRANCISCO, July —, 19—.

"CHESTER CLARKE, ESQ.

"State Street, Boston.

"Consider everything restored to our former understanding. Will meet you at Old Curiosity Shop, Wednesday, July —.

"LOUISE."

Chester Clarke had arrived in New York. It was the day before his tryst with Louise. He had gone down a day in advance to transact some business and to spend the night at the Lawyers Club, where he was to dine with a friend.

The two had sat up well into the night in an atmosphere surcharged with the ele-

ments of the law. Pictures of distinguished English and American Judges and of historical scenes hung upon the walls. There was the Trial of Warren Hastings, the Trial of Jeanne d'Arc, the Trial of Charlotte Corday, and half a dozen others.

The conversation of the men about them was heavy with legal phraseology.

At length Clarke had bade his friend good night and retired to his room, glad to be alone while his subconscious mind was dwelling constantly upon Louise and their coming meeting with its uncertain outcome. He lay awake for some time, turning the situation over and wondering whether she had had a real awakening, whether she still loved him, whether a happy married life would still be possible.

At length he slept, for two or three hours perhaps; and then there was a moment of confusion and he found himself sitting up in bed and staring wildly about, trying to recall where he was, for he had come out of a most realistic dream.

Had it been a dream or a vision? He seemed to have been in a court room, lofty and spacious. He sat at a table within the bar. On the wall above the Judge's bench

was a coat of arms and on it the motto, "Eureka." He remembered distinctly having read that. At a table on the right side of the enclosure Louise sat with her counsel. The room was crowded with an audience mostly of fashionably dressed women. At a long table just without the bar sat a row of newspaper reporters, one of whom, a woman, he could see was making a sketch of Louise.

He turned to look at the man beside him; it was his old college friend, Triggs—Triggs who had opened a law office in San Francisco twenty years before and who had won fame in one of the Lucky Baldwin will cases.

A door beside the bench opened and the Judge was ushered in. There was an air of expectancy in the faces of all present. He took his seat, and after a moment or two devoted to wiping and adjusting his spectacles, he began to read:

"In the case of Chester Clarke *vs.* Clara Louise Clarke, Petition for the Annulment of a Marriage Contract, the Court finds—"

"In the case of Chester Clarke *vs.* Clara Louise Clarke, Petition for the Annulment of a Marriage contract,—the Court finds

—" here Clarke was able to recall the next words: "that a Common Law marriage in New York is any mutual agreement between the parties to be husband and wife."

"In the case of Chester Clarke *vs.* Clara Louise Clarke, Petition for the Annulment of a Marriage Contract, the Court finds—" he said it over and over again, trying to remember what more the Court had found, what it was the Judge had said. It was not a long opinion. He was sure of that because it was all over so soon. The whole scene of his dream could not have taken over five minutes. He had awakened as the Judge rose to leave the bench.

"Chester Clarke *vs.* Clara Louise Clarke." He was the plaintiff, then; he was the petitioner for the annulment of their marriage. Now he recalled how surprised he had been to find himself in court seeking to annul their marriage. It seemed to him that it was the last thing he would be doing. The Judge had dismissed the bill and there was something about costs, the Costs of Court. He had lost his case, evidently, if the bill was dismissed.

Clarke went over the whole scene again, step by step, making a supreme effort to

concentrate his mind and bring back the Judge's words. He failed, save and except that a statute, some statute, had figured in the finding; it had something to do with the Judge's decision. It must have been the ground for dismissing the bill. But what statute? Could there be one affecting his petition for the annulment of a marriage at common law?

"Good God," he cried, "could there be one that had made his marriage to Louise null and void!"

The thought was intolerable. He jumped from his bed and hastened to the open window. Gradually the vision faded and reality took its place.

The first gray streaks of the dawn were in the sky. They touched the higher points of the city buildings while the streets themselves still lay in shadow.

Clarke heard the rattling of a passing vehicle in the street far below; there were other sounds that heralded the coming day, but the voice of the Judge in his dream was still in his ear.

A shiver ran through him. The morning air was chill and he returned to bed. He lay there trying to collect his thoughts.

That a common law marriage — any mutual agreement between the parties to be husband and wife *in præsenti* — had been legal in New York for many years, he knew by a number of decisions of the State Courts, but a statute might well have been passed by the legislature and his attention never have been called to it. No lawyer pretended to know the statute law of any State except his own, and even in his own State a statute might well have escaped his notice. Such a contingency had not occurred to him. He would know the truth the first thing in the morning.

The opening of the Law Library found him at the door.

He took down a codification of the Acts of the Legislature and ran through them in feverish haste. Sure enough, there it was; and as he read it, section by section, he was made aware that the learned Judge of his vision — dream — trance — call it what you will, had quoted correctly.

It provided that a marriage, in order to be legal, must be solemnized before a clergyman, minister, leader of The Society for Ethical Culture, Mayor, Judge of a Court of Record and various other officials, or be

entered into by written contract with two witnesses and acknowledged before a Judge of a Court of Record.

Hence Louise was not his wife in the contemplation of the law! For a moment he was startled, almost shocked, at the thought, but he rallied quickly, for his conscience was absolutely clear in the matter. Each had entered into the contract, such as it was, freely and believing beyond doubt that it made them man and wife. There had therefore been no intentional violation of the moral code. As for the rest, had he not been hoping, praying, demanding that their marriage be made public? Was there less reason for him to do so now?

But what of Louise? How would she treat such a piece of information? She had telegraphed him that their relations were restored, which, in the light of his demands, must have meant that she would yield to them. It only remained to decide when and how.

If he told her, would it change her attitude? He failed to see why it should, further than to make her insistent that a public ceremony should take place as a confirmation of her own good faith, and the in-

surance of her honor. If, upon their meeting, there was a complete reconciliation and understanding and she proposed to arrange at once for a public wedding, would he not be justified in withholding this information as something that at best would only tend to distress her, and to no purpose?

And here again the New England conscience and sense of duty came into its own.

To withhold would be to conceal something that she had the right to know, no matter if the only result was a negative one, so Clarke started for the Old Curiosity Shop resolved to tell her.

CHAPTER IX

MERE existence may be measured satisfactorily in terms of time, but for living there is no adequate method of mensuration save by units of experience. Forty years of placid being may leave the rustic's poll thatch unflecked with white, while in as many hours the savior — or the wrecker — of a nation becomes bowed and gray as if broken by the weight of years. In the crises of life an hour, a day, a week may pass like a moment; and a moment may enfold an eternity in the history of a soul.

Chester Clarke was now engulfed in one of these undimensioned deeps of experience. Physical facts were without his conscious ken, his actions and reactions were automatic responses to the stimuli of various contacts with the material world about him. He dwelt in a timeless universe of the mind.

His whole conscious being centered upon one thing, the crisis in his relations with Louise, and here it was acutely conscious — it was, in fact, one clear, white flame of consciousness. He moved in the light of a

lambent love. His spirit had found its mate; some factor in the chemistry of souls had prevented the blend of the affinitive elements, and he must make this last endeavor to eliminate that factor from the formula.

That it would be the last endeavor there could be no doubt. In this interview there could be no equivocation, no concealment, no evasion. The husks of pretense and misunderstanding must be stripped off and cast aside, and the inner kernel of truth exposed.

If he found his hopes had been false; if it were the fact that he had mistaken tinsel for pure metal: what then? Clarke confronted this possibility with firm self-control. That he could admit its possibility showed how deep were the black waters into which he had been plunged. Admitting it, he proved his mettle by characteristically ignoring the existence of such means of escape as have often, in similar circumstances, revealed themselves temptingly to men of softer substance. He recognized the possibility of great grief ahead; but his thoughts took no tinge of the color of despair. He had a woman's sensitiveness to pain, but he had also the courage of a truly strong man.

In such a state of mind Clarke went to

meet Louise, externally calm and controlled, but buffeted and bruised by cruel forebodings.

He came to the Giese house. Its front was a little more dingy, its external premise of internal dilapidation a little more unmistakable. The shingle that commemorated the vocation of the departed Hans was shabbier, and hung on a slant, sharing the prevalent decay. What an odd asylum for the remnant of Chester Clarke's hopes! He did not stop to frame a wish forfending the omen, but went steadily up the steps and rang the bell.

Mrs. Giese came to the door. She had not changed. She was evidently lingering on, buoyed on the lonely sea of her life by the one animating purpose of her existence; to keep things just as they were, just as old Hans had left them.

She wasted no words in greeting. She was expecting Clarke.

"Come in, sir," she said. "Your wife is in her old room; she is not well, she is a sick lady. Everything is just as it was."

The words echoed in the gloomy hall: "Just as it was." And as Clarke passed through the apartment, the walls gave forth

the same faint odor of mouldy age, the parlor revealed to his passing glance the same musty array of useless antiquities, everything was "just as it had been." Everything? At the door to Louise's room he paused a moment: Everything? He went in.

Louise was in bed. Her dark hair lay in loose masses over the pillow. In the dim light she seemed wan and worn. He was sure that she had been crying; she, who was so strong, so imperiously resolute in refusing to be battered by the adversities of fate! A great wave of pity swept over him.

"Louise!" he called: and, kneeling by the bed, as once she had knelt by his, he put his arms about her and whispered words of endearment.

She lay a moment in his embrace, and it seemed to him that even yet all must be well, the bad dream come to an end.

Then she withdrew herself, and let her head fall back upon the pillow. For a moment she shook with soundless sobbing, and Clarke felt the agonies that can rend a strong man's soul.

"Oh, Chester," she cried, "how could you do it, how could you do it!"

The words brought him back suddenly to the world of realities. The problem had not been dissipated in the flood of tender feeling. There was love in her reception of his greeting; her action had been too swift and sure to be premeditated, to be anything but the spontaneous expression of her nature. He steeled himself for the battle with the cruel thing that lay back of this strange, obstinate denial of the true self made manifest in her first, natural act.

He arose, and seated himself in a chair a few feet away. It was like moving out of the territory of the heart into the colder region of the brain. And he felt that Louise also recognized the change, and was meeting it with a corresponding mental shift.

"Now," he said, steadily enough, "we have got to settle this thing. We're at a fork in the road, Louise, and we've got to decide which way we're going to travel—and whether we go together, or—" he hesitated ever so slightly, then went on firmly—"or whether we take separate ways."

"It depends very largely on you." She spoke in a monotone, without inflection.

"Louise!"

"Yes. You have created this situation.

Why did you do it? When I was so happy, when things were going so nicely! Why could you not wait—"

"I did wait! I have waited, and waited, and waited. I have accepted one postponement after another. I did not like the secret engagement—"

"Why did you accept it, then?"

"I accepted it for your sake. I accepted it for the children's sake. And, having accepted it, I stood by the agreement faithfully, as long as the circumstances that brought it about continued to exist. But when the will was made, when the children were provided for and had been won over to the idea of our marriage, when every obstacle had been removed, then it became unjust and unreasonable for you to require me to go on waiting, and then I asked for an early date for our public wedding—"

"But, Chester, I have told you why it could not be! Mother Willoughby still had power to cut the children off—Ernest was not really reconciled to my remarrying—father was not well—I was so settled in California, and so far, in every way, from Boston—I did not want to marry you till everything was right."

"To marry me!" Clarke repeated, "we were married, or at least we believed we were." Clarke made the last statement with so strange an inflection, it carried such an implication of doubt that Louise was startled into the suspicion of something under the surface of his words.

"Why do you speak in that queer way?" she asked.

"Queer way?" he repeated the words automatically. Then he spoke, with close attention to his own choice of words:

"Louise, listen carefully to what I have to tell you. Our fate depends on what you make of it.

"I wrote you that we were married in the sight of God and man, that our wedding was a holy sacrament, and a legal bond."

She sat up in bed and stared at him. For the settlement of any issue less vital, the scene would have made a grotesque setting. But neither of the protagonists had heed for such matters.

"Well?" she said. The hardly restrained eagerness in her voice hurt Clarke through and through. It was crucifixion for him.

"Well," he said heavily, "in my view then, ever since, *and ever more*—that cere-

mony, in this house, before the altar you had made, bound you to me and me to you with a tie as sacred and indissoluble as any vow ever registered at any altar of Almighty God."

He spoke with deep earnestness. His voice and air were those of a prophet whose words were winged with inspiration.

"As long as I live, and whatever happens, you are, you shall be, the wife of my heart. Nothing can rob me of that belief."

He fell back into a more prosaic utterance.

"Now for the crux of it all. I believed that we were legally married. I supposed, with a perfect honesty you will not wish or dare to impugn, that the common law marriage still held good in New York. I have only just discovered that I was wrong; that a statute has been passed annulling such marriages, that there must be a contract, legally executed.

"In one word," he concluded, "I have learned—what does not change my own conviction but does undeniably alter the legal quality of our relations—I have learned" (it took supreme courage to pronounce the words) "that you and I are *not* married in the eye of the law—"

"Oh, Chester!" she cried. "Then you have no hold on me! Oh, how—"

She stopped, perhaps with surprise at the change in his face, perhaps with pity.

Chester Clarke sat like a man waiting for the fall of the dagger in the hand of a trusted friend, as Cæsar may have looked at Brutus, not resisting, but numbed with horror.

He pulled himself together. He was pale, his face was drawn, but he spoke calmly.

"If you feel that way, it is indeed the end. I would have won you back, if my understanding of the law had proved correct. I would not have let you go—by God, I would not! I would have saved you from yourself"—he spoke more quietly again—"I would have saved you, Louise, from what I now see you mean to do. I would have saved your happiness, and mine."

He paused. She lay back on the pillow again, weak in reaction from the great stress of emotion, but, as he saw with cruel clearness, rejoicing in the prospect of "freedom" so easily attainable.

For three or four minutes no word more was said.

Then Clarke stood up, and looking squarely at her, with his hands clasped

tightly behind his back, in a pose characteristic of him as a pleader, he said:

"Louise, what is your decision? It must be given now, once and for all. I shall not hold you, shall not try to hold you, if you say you wish to go — free. But for God's sake, for my sake and for your own, be careful what you say! There can be no reconsideration. Will you marry me — now — or — "

His brave voice broke.

He read his fate in her face. The dream was over. His idol was shattered. His sweet cup of love was turned to poison.

She had the grace not to speak. She simply turned away her lovely head.

Clarke made no sound of grief. It was his soul that groaned, inaudibly.

He took her hand, that lay on the outside of the bed. He carried it tenderly to his lips, and held it there long and with passionate pressure.

Still no word escaped his lips, no groan was wrung from his heart of agony. But his body trembled pitifully.

At last he arose.

The room was very dim and still.

He spoke, softly, yearningly, but with an

impressive finality. Just two words, but they set the seal of irrevocable renunciation upon the love-life of Chester Clarke.

"Goodbye, Louise!"

. . . . . .

Walking in the park, hours afterward, a man, calm enough to all appearances but actually just emerging from the dark depths of a maelstrom of suffering, stood in the moonlight atop a little knoll and, raising his hand like one who takes a solemn oath, pronounced these words in a voice vibrant with mingled passion and resolve:

"I am the master of my fate—
I am the captain of my soul."

And Chester Clarke went forth to meet his future, well aware of its difficulties, but consciously strong to bear the burden, and never to turn back to the closed pages in the book of his life.

EPILOGUE

ON a certain day of July in 19—, a man stopped in front of a beautiful place in the most exclusive residential section of San Francisco. In the midst of spacious grounds, embowered with flowering shrubs and trees, stood a splendid house. It was built of white stucco, in mission style, and its porches and balconies, shaded but airy, and its many vine-framed and sun-screened windows, gave promise of very comfortable living for those who called it home.

The man was tall and distinguished in appearance. A student of mankind would have looked at him a second time in any gathering, so clear a story was recorded, in his strong features, of a struggle with fate and a conquest of hostile circumstances. After a few minutes he arrested an old gentleman who happened to be passing, with the inquiry:

"Can you tell me, sir, to whom this beautiful house belongs? It is unusually attractive."

"With pleasure," replied the old gentleman. "I'm glad you like it, for we are quite proud of it. In fact, it is one of our show places — all the sight-seeing autos stop in front of it and the lecturer has a word to say of the charming widow who lives there."

The stranger acknowledged the information with a slight bow.

"The place, sir," continued the old gentleman, "is called by us San Franciscans the Alhambra. It is the home of hospitality; it is the citadel of charity and religion; it is the shrine of music, the temple of art and literature; it is the house of mirth."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the stranger. "I did not suppose you could crowd so much under one roof outside a *bon marché*, but I could believe that house capable of almost anything."

"That house," said the gentleman, "was built by an old fellow from Kansas who had retired from business. He had a lovely daughter, a widow, who took the Coast by storm and became *crême de la crême* of our society. Her career was wonderful. I can take a little personal pride in it, since I might be said to have been the architect of her fortunes."

"How was that?" asked the stranger with increased interest.

"Well, I have a good deal, quite a good deal, of influence out this way. I control the *San Francisco Blade*. I made the discovery a good many years ago, or perhaps I invented the formula, that in proportion to the space that a woman commanded in an American newspaper was her social status determined, if the thing was handled right—tactfully, you understand. It is an art, Sir, and I have mastered it."

"I was charmed with this lady. I had no daughter of my own, and I unofficially adopted her. I determined to put my formula into operation—to boom her. It was n't much different from booming a gold mine or a seaside resort. The principle is the same, and I had the goods. She was a beauty, she had money, she had brains, and she aspired to shine.

"First it was a notice of her dinner party, then her picture in a fetching gown, then a word of speculation as to what her next triumph would be.

"It worked, sir. It worked to a charm. More than that, my methods seem to have met a long felt want, for they have been

adopted in the East; in fact, are fast becoming a national institution.

"Your grandmother, young man, might have shrunk from such publicity, but a 'bud' would never bloom in these days unless she was exposed, at least once a month during the season, to the sunshine of newspaper publicity.

"But to return to what I was telling you of the beautiful widow—she was born to command adulation, praise, and the power which money brings. She revelled in the social struggle which she entered against all comers and she won. In fact, she has carried her success so far that she has turned the tables on the newspapers. No newspaper would be in the running without the story of her doings.

"Her social functions must be followed and reported, the size of her contributions to charitable and religious enterprises must be stated, since they set the pace for others to follow.

"She is a patron of music. She has put a dozen aspirants in the way of a successful music career. The budding poet and artist find refuge under the shadow of her wings. She is a devoted church-woman. A mission

chapel stands in the Sand Lots, as a memorial to her father. The priest and the reformer are beholden to her bounty. The poor are never turned away from her door empty-handed, and the 'four hundred' have named her place the house of mirth. All of this and more the newspapers have duly reported and enlarged upon.

"Theoretically, a woman having everything in the world to make her happy and with no man to dominate her ought to be miserable, perfectly miserable; but you see, this one is n't. I 'll be sworn, she is n't. Quite the contrary; she is happy, radiantly happy, because she is constantly in the limelight and she revels in her power."

"And the lady's name, sir?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, yes, the lady's name! The name is Mrs. Walter Willoughby. You must have heard it."

"Yes, I have — I have heard it."

"Perhaps you have met her?" asked the old man — "very lovely — "

"Yes," said the stranger, "I — I think I met her once. That was some time ago. The house seems closed."

"Yes, she is abroad," replied the elderly

man, "in London. She has just been presented at Court. The newspapers gave a column to her gown, all cabled across at twenty-five cents a word."

He paused a moment in reflection, then said:

"She has reached the goal she set for herself, the highest pinnacle of social greatness."

Leaving San Francisco, the stranger apostrophized the city:

"Serene, indifferent of fate
Thou sittest at the Western gate."

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